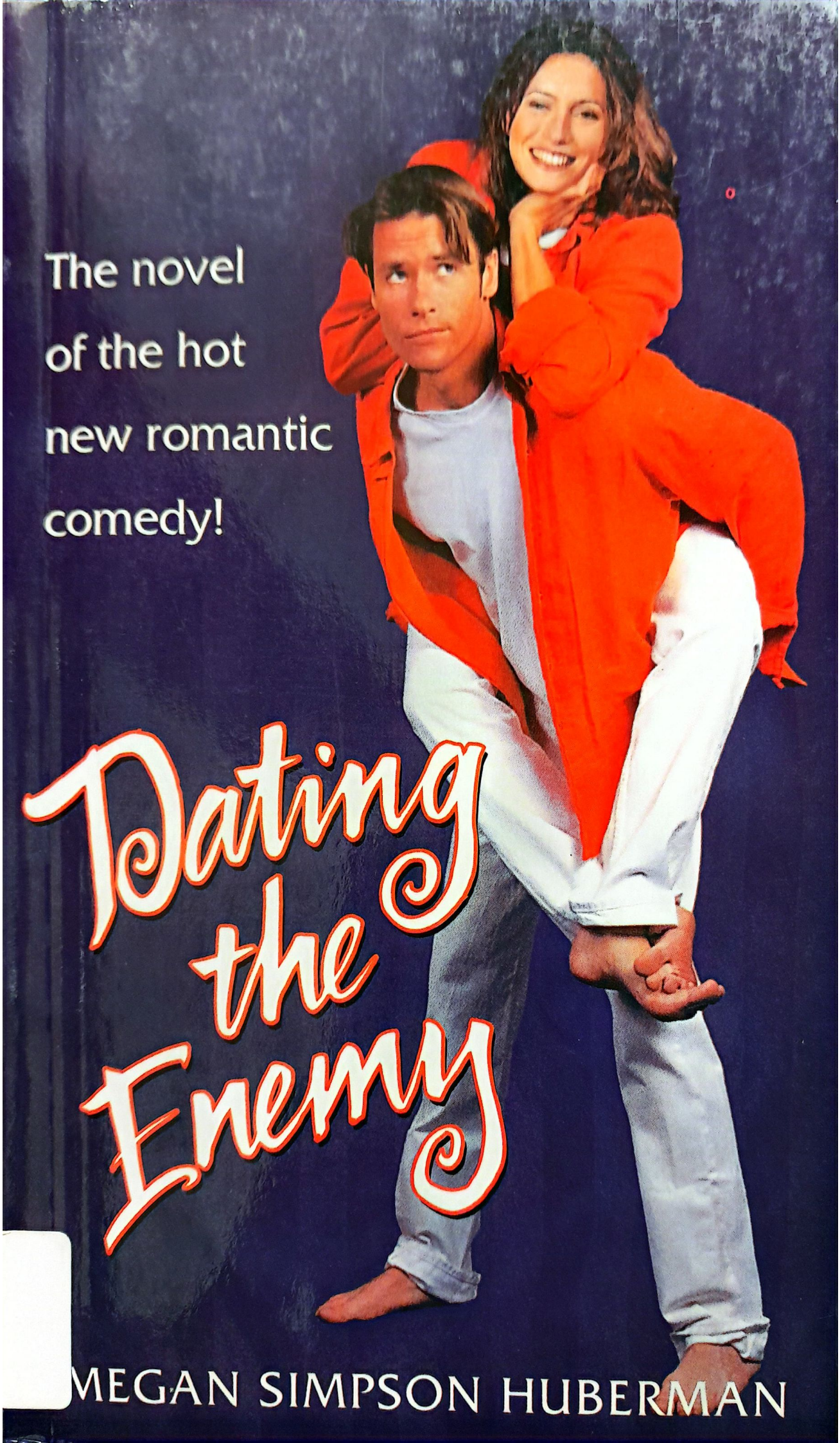
The novel
of the hot
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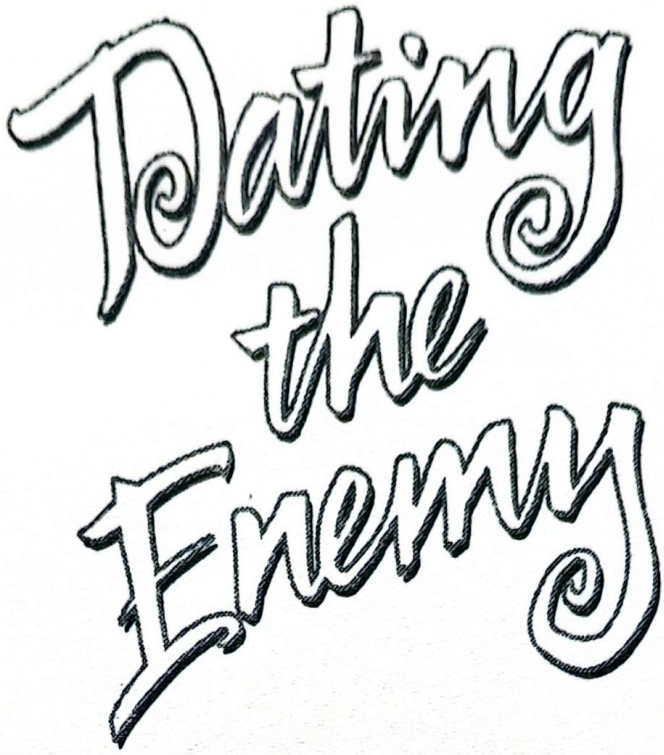
comedy!
Dating
the
Enemy
MEGAN SIMPSON HUBERMAN

DATING THE ENEMY

Megan Simpson Huberman grew up in Western Australia, where she studied film and literature at the West Australian Institute of Technology. She went on to continue her studies at the Ecole Nationale Louis Lumière in Paris, and the Australian Film, Television and Radio and School in Sydney, from which she graduated in 1987. She wrote *Dating the Enemy* as a screenplay over a five-year period, and in 1996 directed the film. Megan Simpson Huberman lives in Sydney with her husband, Roi Huberman, and they occasionally swap bodies.



MEGAN SIMPSON
HUBERMAN

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One

MEN ARE FROM MARS

If aliens were to observe life on earth on the fourteenth of February in any year, they would notice a strange ritual. In cities all over the planet, women are divided into two groups — the loved and the unloved. And the mark of this division is red roses.

The loved are given roses to carry about with them all day, as a badge of their special state. They display them proudly on their desks at work; and, in the evening, parade with them through the city on buses on their way home, or to restaurants, where they will be further fêted with wine, dinner, chocolates, and very small items of lacy lingerie.

The unloved begin the day with a tiny spark of hopefulness. Perhaps this year will be different. Perhaps this year someone will send them flowers, and change their status forever. In the morning their minds run over the long shots and outside chances. Perhaps an ex-boyfriend will be feeling nostalgic. Maybe that man in the sales department who is always so friendly at the photocopier ...

But by lunchtime, hope is fading. Flowers have arrived on the desks of other women, along with cards and faxes and phone calls accompanied by blushes and laughter. The unloved, whose desks are bare, endure the day with a kind of grim determination. They make their way home through the city, bloomless, holding their heads high on the buses, so as not to see the bouquets in the arms of women all around them. They return alone to their apartments, and dine on a Yoplait with a teaspoon, and tell themselves that Valentine's Day is a commercialised con trick. But as they lie in their beds with the light out, and listen to the sound of champagne corks popping echoing from other apartments, they whisper to themselves that next year — next year — will be different.

Whoever St Valentine was, he was a sadist. Or a florist.

The roses arrived at the offices of *Chic* magazine at exactly the right time. Through the venetians on the glass wall of her office, left open expressly for this purpose, Laetitia saw the courier arrive at reception. He was holding the large sheath of perfect crimson buds reverently, one hand around the stems, the crook of the other arm supporting the velvety-petalled heads, as if he'd spent six months at courier school just

learning this one task. And so he should, thought Laetitia. Two dozen long-stemmed from Roses Only added up to a figure that was probably equivalent to half his weekly wage. They were spectacularly long, and apart from the clear cellophane, unadorned except for their own crisp, dark green leaves. You can't beat classical style, she thought.

There was a stir amongst the other women at the desks as they spotted the flowers. It was 11 a.m. Exactly the right time for red roses to be delivered. Everyone, even the alcoholics in the restaurant review section, had arrived at work by now, and no one had gone to lunch yet. Heads turned, conversations paused, people watched to see where the man was going. Feigning obliviousness, Laetitia dialled a number on her phone. At the other end, the recorded weather report began to play, and she started a business-like conversation with a male voice that was warning her of the possibility of late afternoon showers. She felt the eyes of the office upon her as the courier approached, felt a wave of feminine envy exuding from the thirty women and one gay male art director in the room. She made some serious-looking notes on her pad — she wrote FRUIT, and SHOE POLISH — and, only when the courier was right at her desk, looked up at the interruption and smiled. Not a vulgar, too-eager smile, but a pleasant,

professional, beauty editor's smile, like a duchess bestowing loose change on a child. She asked the weather report, which was now repeating itself, to hold for a moment, took the flowers without looking at them and thanked the courier. She listened to the weather report twice more before she put the phone down. Then she took the card from the roses, read it quickly and reached for her handbag. Conscious of the eyes outside observing her, she glanced at the card again before dropping it into her handbag. Then she called Miranda, her assistant, and asked her to put the roses in some water.

The whole performance went off perfectly. Best money I've ever spent, she thought to herself. But as the day wore on, it felt strangely less satisfying. At four o'clock, someone's husband came to take them out to drinks and then a special dinner, and at five-thirty she found the junior receptionist (one of the unloved) crying in the stationery cupboard. By six o'clock, as she trudged her way across three city blocks lugging the damned roses, and fighting her way through crowds of people carrying red soft toys, nylon flowers in plastic cylinders, and helium-filled heart-shaped balloons, she was sick to the back teeth of Valentine's Day. Was it possible that everyone was buying all this stuff for themselves? Or was she the only desperado? As she passed a couple clamped

together in a passionate and ostentatious embrace in the middle of the footpath, she felt an overwhelming desire to kick them. She restrained herself, and bumped them with her briefcase instead. It helped. A little.

'God save me from couples,' she moaned as she staggered through the doorway of Paul's apartment.

'You're safe. None of those in here,' said Rob, standing at the kitchen bench mixing margaritas. She stuck out her hand and he put a full glass into it. It was not until she drained her way to the bottom that she had the courage to look around.

It was true. Here they were, her closest friends, all single, and more than that, all dateless on Valentine's Day night. The rest of the world was jammed into restaurants, at tables for two, and here they were — herself, Rob, Paul, and Christina — sitting around in Paul's apartment looking out at the city and waiting for Tash who was — for the first time in Laetitia's experience and Laetitia was Tash's best friend — late. What was wrong with them?

Be objective, Laetitia thought. Look at them as an outsider would.

First Paul. Well — his apartment was fabulous. So fabulous in fact that she had several times considered doing the deed with him in order to move in. However, she had the sneaking suspicion that

sexually he'd be the equivalent of a cheese sandwich, and, let's face it, real estate prices can fluctuate, whereas good sex is like the Deutschmark. He wasn't bad looking, though he did have appalling taste in shirts — a joke should be something you make, not wear — but his shoes were good. He was a futures exchange dealer, which was, as far as Laetitia could make out, a kind of glorified accountant, but it was good money, and that counted for a lot. Really a lot, especially these days, when every second man you met in cafés was a Freelancer in New Media Technologies, which was shorthand for saying they were unemployed and played a lot of video games. Christina, who shared Paul's apartment (on a strictly platonic-flatmate basis) reported that he had no overtly repelling personal habits. Paul would make an excellent husband for someone, though just off the cuff Laetitia couldn't think who.

Rob was tall, and had dark hair, and should have been cute except for the fact that he was, well, Rob. It was a cliché, and she hated to resort to clichés (especially on the same day that she had come up with the unforgettable line 'The Wit of a Wig' for next month's feature on hair), but — Rob was too nice. He had no thrill, no spill, no danger. He always returned calls when he said he would, and never flirted with anyone else in your presence. He should have had

some cachet, because he directed television, and in fact was about to start work on a new music video program, which would undoubtedly mean he would receive invitations to fashionable parties (always an attractive quality in a person). However, he remained the one none of them wanted to date but all said they would marry, if they got to thirty-five and were still single (Rob's compliance in this plan being taken for granted). His problem was that they had all known him as a friend for so long, none of them could really take the thought of sleeping with him seriously. Somewhere in all those years of helping them move house, and letting them weep on his shoulder when someone else had broken their hearts, he had lost his sexual identity. He had become part of the furniture. He was like the seventies floral sofa that you don't throw out, but send off to the beach house. You don't want it with you on a day-to-day basis, but you want to know that it's there, around somewhere, in case you need it.

Tash — in Laetitia's opinion — was really lovely, even though her hair did tend to tumble into her eyes whenever she became intense, which happened as soon as anybody mentioned anything to do with physics, chemistry or higher maths. But, fortunately, it was often possible to get through a whole night at a party or a bar without people referring to sub-atomic

particles or the fate of the universe even once, in which case Tash's soft brown hair stayed more or less where it ought to. Laetitia had tried — god, how she had tried — to educate Tash in the importance of Hair, and Handbags, and the New Look for Nails, but Tash remained stubbornly unglamorous. A rose hidden beneath the bramble of badly-coordinated knitwear and modest-length skirts. And even when some unusually perceptive male connoisseur noticed Tash's loveliness, and tried to draw her out, she blushed and stammered, and spilled drinks over herself until he went away. She was like a tiger at work, in her own world of science journalism, but she performed badly in the social jungle. She simply did not know how to flirt, and Laetitia feared that this was a skill that could not be taught. Her hope for Tash was that she would meet a man exactly like herself, but with money, so that he could pay for all the extensive dry-cleaning they would require in their happy and boffinish life together.

Christina? Christina was slim, with long hair, and looked a bit like a wan fairy. She was kind. She was a good friend. She remembered everyone's birthday. Christina was nice. Well, everyone else said so. Laetitia privately thought that Christina had the charisma of a wet Sao, but hey, there were plenty of men out there whom you didn't remember three

seconds after meeting them and they also needed someone to love. Indeed, Laetitia thought that when you considered how many unmemorable men there were in the world, Christina's prospects ought to be better than anyone's.

Finally there was herself. Sitting here this evening, with good features, red hair, well-toned curves and cleavage and shapely legs all nicely on display in a low-cut midriff top under a loose blouse and a sarong that opened all the way up her thigh. If you've got it, flaunt it. Laetitia had it, flaunted it, and lately had had the feeling that she couldn't give it away. She had decided that this was all men's fault. The other half of the species was simply not coming up to scratch. Laetitia vaguely remembered reading an article in a magazine about the world's declining sperm count, and thought this might have something to do with it.

As she'd recently explained to Tash, she divided men, sperm or no sperm, into four categories: Desirables, To-Die-Fors, Divorcees and Disasters.

'Desirables are the ones you want but they're always married or just about to be. They're like some kind of exotic bird that only comes into season once every seven years, and then only for about four days. The law of averages will have it that those are exactly the four days when you've sprained your ankle and are Oprah-bound on the couch, so you'll only ever

meet them at their wedding. But they're the real thing. They're handsome yet decent, employed but not mean with their money, and you can see them at barbecues ruffling the hair of small children.

'To-Die-Fors are the ones you think you want, but that's just hormonal confusion. They're gorgeous; they exude sex and danger, but they perform very poorly on a long-term basis. They never get married — correction: they get married so often it doesn't count; and you can see them taunting small children at barbecues when the hosts are not looking. Their real function is biological. They were put on earth to keep women's spirits up and keep them interested in sex while they're waiting for the elusive Mr Desirable to come along.

'Now, Divorcees are only interested in one thing, and one thing only — '

' — sex?' Tash had interrupted, laughing.

'I should be so lucky. No, what they want is sympathy. Hours and hours and hours of it. Then there's the Disasters, but let's not depress ourselves by going into detail about them.'

No, let's not, Laetitia thought, drifting out of her reverie and back into the present. She held out her glass for another refill, and flopped onto the couch, dumping her roses unceremoniously on the coffee table in front of her.

'At least one of us has an admirer,' said Rob,

looking at them.

For a half-second after Rob's question, Laetitia was tempted to fib about the roses but she took a sip of her margarita and said, 'Yeah, my florist. I spent a hundred and forty bucks on those.'

'You didn't!' Christina was shocked. Christina was easily shocked, and shocking Christina was in fact one of Laetitia's favourite sports, but tonight her particularly prim tone inspired Laetitia to go further than usual in explaining Just How Things Really Were. Time for a reality check in fairyland, Laetitia thought grimly.

'If I'm desperate enough,' she began in the style of one explaining the facts of life to a five year old, 'to be spending Valentine's night with my friends, playing Strip Trivial Pursuit, then I am quite desperate enough to send myself flowers. I didn't want the whole magazine to know that their beauty editor doesn't have a date.'

Paul swung round the couch with the Trivial Pursuit box.

'And the rules of the game are,' he was saying, 'you get a question right, you advance. You get it wrong — you forfeit a piece of your attire. You haven't left yourself much room for error, Laetitia.'

Eight articles of clothing in fact, Laetitia itemised, counting her jewellery and blouse, sarong, bikini top

and bottom. She had a relatively good general knowledge but nonetheless she calculated it shouldn't take long to get most of that off. She preened herself a little and said, stretching, 'Well, it's hot — very hot.' The stretch made all the pieces of clothing — the blouse, the sarong — that didn't quite meet, open some more, showing a nice sheen on the skin of her thigh and cleavage. It was all a bit wasted on this platonic bunch, but she had her own standards to maintain. Her personal code was: you go out of the house, you dress for sex. No matter how slim the chances. If you gave up hope, you were liable to find yourself walking round town in tracksuit pants and a windcheater with yoghurt stains on it, and from there, there was no way back.

'I can't believe we're really going to do this,' said Christina. She gave Paul a look, half-guilty, half-thrilled. Laetitia reflected that Christina, who was a couple of years younger than she was, had probably never even played spin-the-bottle. It was terrible what deprived childhoods people could have. Privately, Laetitia's idea of a thrilling evening was more the kind after which you found half of your underwear hanging off the verandah, and the other half not at all.

'Come on,' she said wearily, 'with these guys, it's like seeing your brother in the shower.' That's what they were, these men, she thought — brothers. She

was wondering whether 'Brothers' should form a whole new category of their own or be a subset of some other category like Desirables or Disasters, when she came to a complete halt.

A man had appeared through the door from the terrace. He was approaching them and smiling. He was very handsome — tall, dark hair, perfect jaw — with an extraordinarily cheeky look in his eyes. He ran his hand through his hair and smiled at her as Rob made the introductions.

'Laetitia, this is Brett, an old friend of mine from Melbourne. He's just got the job of host on our new music show, "express".'

'And you're to die for,' Laetitia added to herself, 'completely.'

'Hi,' she said, her eyes upon him.

Rob, watching from the sidelines, noted that Laetitia's voice seemed to have dropped several registers and gained a husky quality, and she had made a movement — god knows how — that was imperceptible but which meant that everything, breasts, bare waist, thigh, was more on display than ever. Brett perused the display in the flick of an eye, but didn't seem ready to make a purchase. Before Rob could continue with the introductions, the doorbell rang, and he said quickly, 'I'll get that.'

Laetitia cast an admiring glance at Brett's rear as

he disappeared down the hallway, then raised her eyebrows appreciatively at Christina.

'He's a sort of journalist — maybe he and Tash'll have something in common,' Christina said excitedly.

Only if I'm not breathing, thought Laetitia, quickly adjusting her bikini top. She looked up at Christina scathingly. 'Tash is a science journalist. He's going to read the Top Twenty backwards while sitting in a lounge chair.' She let that sink in for a second before continuing. 'It's a very different thing.'

Brett opened the door. Tash stared at him in surprise. Who was this stranger opening Paul's door? He, just as surprised, stared back. Standing in front of him, on the doorstep, was a girl almost totally buried in clothes: shirt, jumper, vest, jacket and coat, all topped off with a scarf and a woolly hat. She looked as if she was turning up for St Valentine's night in the wrong hemisphere. All he could really see of her was a heart-shaped face, and two golden brown eyes, peeping out of a tangle of wool and hair. But it was one of the most beautiful faces he had ever seen.

'Hi,' he said.

'Oh. Hi,' she said.

Two

TRIVIAL PURSUITS

BRETT

I've always known when good things were going to happen for me. I can feel luck, like the sea beneath a surfboard, swelling into waves around me, and I can tell without looking at the horizon when it's going to carry me to its crest.

It's only bad things I can't predict, the moment when the wave disappears beneath me, and I fall through the air like a stone. Sometimes I wish it was the other way round, because this way, whenever something good happens, I'm always waiting for the king hit from behind.

But that morning, when Rob called and told me to fly up from Melbourne because he'd got me a shot at auditioning as the host of his new music show, I could feel luck stirring. As the plane flew over Sydney on its approach, the city seemed to open itself to me. And as I strode into the studio, I cruised, I glided on luck. I had no T.V. experience, and nothing on my c.v. except some on-again, off-again record reviewing for *Metro* magazine, and my weekly show on a very

left-of-centre alternative radio station with a very left-of-centre audience size. But when I flopped down on the sofa in the middle of the set, it felt like my lounge room. I could sense the cameras being drawn to me, like schoolgirls with a crush. I owned them; they were there for me; and I knew the job was mine.

So when I go out with Rob that night to celebrate, I am really on a high. It's Valentine's night, one of my favourite nights of the year — you can *feel* the sex in the air — and Sydney is dressed up for the occasion. I stand on the balcony of his friend Paul's apartment, and look out. The city is covered in lights, the air is warm, and smells of salt, and cars, and women's perfume. I can feel the luck still curling and surfing around me. Something is going to happen.

The sound of a new voice floats out from the lounge room. I walk back inside, and see a woman, newly arrived, sitting on the couch. And she sees me.

Now I know what a magnet feels like when pins and paperclips come hurtling towards it, drawn by its own force, uncontrollably. Laetitia, as Rob introduces her, is in my force field, and every hormone in her is rushing my way. Even the buttons on her shirt are popping open, apparently of their own accord. And they know what they're on about, because she is my kind of girl.

Was my kind of girl. The kind I always ended up

with. Until now. In an instant I could tell how the evening would end. In a blur of martinis and fairly explosive sex. And as I fell asleep looking at the black lingerie all over her floor, and the view of the city out her apartment window, I'd tell myself that this was the life.

But in the morning, when I woke, there'd be a sinking feeling in my stomach. A small voice somewhere in my head saying, 'This is not it. This is not it.' And I'd get out of there as quickly as I could. Maybe we'd repeat the whole act a few more times; a few more drinks, a few more parties, a few more nights looking out that window. But in a couple of weeks it would end, with recriminations, tears, and a slam of the phone.

I do not want this any more. I have a feeling there is another kind of girl out there for me, circling, waiting to land, if only I do not make the same mistake and board the wrong plane. So I ignore the calls that are coming loud and clear from Laetitia's control tower, and, when I hear the knock at the door, I escape up the hallway, breathing a sigh of relief.

And as I open the door, I have a kind of freaky sensation, a tingling all over. I feel luck swell beneath my feet, hear the whispering of its wash, and I know, instinctively, it is going to be the biggest wave of my life.

I feel the blood rushing to my cheeks. My eyes are locked onto his. I cannot say what I am seeing. What colour his eyes are. All sound seems to fade away.

I have not planned for this.

Valentine's Day is my least favourite day of the year, and my system for coping with this is to plan the day, in as much detail as possible, in order to avoid disaster.

When I awake in the morning, no matter how down I feel, I force myself to go for my usual run. You can't be mentally cheerful if you don't have physical wellbeing. The endorphins released by exercise are now an accepted fact.

At work, my main stratagem is to keep busy. I try to time it so that I have a major article to rewrite on this day; plus there is also cleaning up my desk, re-alphabetising the business cards in my contacts folder, and consolidating my hard disk. If, illogically, I feel myself becoming depressed by the sight of bouquets arriving on other desks, I try to challenge my thinking. Why would a sensible person long for roses on the one day of the year when they cost four times their normal value? I do quick mental estimates of the value of the flowers in the office, and remind myself how this money could have been more fruitfully spent on repairing the third world food crisis, or the environment.

In the evening, most importantly, I arrange not to be alone. Most years, Laetitia, Paul, Christina, Rob and I get together on Valentine's night. They are my oldest friends, they are also single, and with them I never feel left out of the festival of coupledom that is being celebrated all around us.

The one flaw in my preparations this year is Paul's plan that we should play Strip Trivial Pursuit. I don't know what's got into him lately, but he was determined. He seems to think it is some kind of post-modern joke. And as everyone else seems to get the punchline, my objections to this plan were outvoted. For me, the prospect is unnerving. I'm not a prude — no, really I'm not — but the world of the body has always seemed a dangerous place to me. As I entered my teens, and saw the bodies of my schoolmates explode around me into complicated fireballs of hormones and unpredictable behaviour, I decided to stay in the world of the mind. I retreated into its calmness and quiet, and I've been there ever since.

So I am determined to arrive for this event armed with more than just my general knowledge, which, though excellent in the areas of science, mathematics, history and literature, is more than a little sketchy in the areas of film stars and pop songs which seem to feature heavily in games like these. I spent some time that morning devising an outfit which consisted of as

many layers of clothing as I thought I could get away with. Shirt, vest, cardigan, jumper, jacket — surely by the time I get through all of those they will all have lost interest in the game and moved on to coffee. I take a hat and coat to put on at the last minute, as insurance, and I feel, as I arrive on Paul's doorstep, that I have really planned for every eventuality.

Except for him.

He is incredibly handsome.

He has a chiselled jawline, shaded with just the faintest trace of stubble. His skin is lightly tanned, and his lips are masculine yet intensely sensual at the same time. I could imagine what it would be like to be kissed by them ...

Suddenly I become aware of what I am doing. I am staring at him.

He is looking at me and seems amused. I move forward quickly, pushing past him.

'Ah — can I take your coat?' he says. His expression is gentle, but I think I can detect a hint of humour in his voice. I try to gather myself together. Drawing my coat around me, I raise my head and speak with as much dignity as I can muster.

'I'm cold. It's very cold.'

They sat around a table on the roof of the building. It was a perfect Sydney summer night. Alongside them,

the pool glowed turquoise, and threw soft watery shadows over their faces. Music played from a ghetto blaster, and the table was covered with margarita glasses.

'What's the capital of United Vietnam?' Laetitia demanded.

Paul frowned in concentration. 'Saigon!' he said.

'Wrong!' yelled Laetitia, thumping the table. She waved the Trivial Pursuit card in his face triumphantly. 'Hanoi.'

Despondent, Paul removed his singlet. Christina smiled at him in sympathy. All he had left to forfeit now were his boardshorts. Across the table from them, Rob was grinning broadly. He was already in the same situation as Paul, nude down to his Mambo shorts. Christina still had a shirt over her swimsuit, while Laetitia had been down to her bikini and sarong for some time.

Compared to the others, Brett and Tash, who were seated at opposite ends of the table, still had most of their clothes on. His feet were bare, and his jacket was gone, but he had kept his shirt and jeans. Tash had forfeited a number of outer layers, but was still largely obscured from view by her bulky coat that seemed, as far as Brett could see, to be attached permanently to her body.

Everyone was mildly drunk and laughing, except

Brett and Tash. Rob, who was always the barman at these kinds of events, and who had been enthusiastically filling glasses all night, noticed that they'd scarcely touched their drinks. The thought set off distant warning bells in his mind, but he was prevented from pursuing it because Laetitia was thumping on the table again.

It was her turn, and she was desperate to get off the last of her removable garments, a mini-sarong. I haven't been suffering on the Stairmaster for nothing, she thought. Let me get down to my bikini, and this man will be mine.

Rob, sitting to her left, picked up the card. 'At the Tokyo Olympics, which individual — '

'Well, I'm out!' cried Laetitia, cutting him off. 'The Olympics have always bored me to death.' She stood up and unwrapped her sarong, aware of Rob and Paul's eyes on her curvy body and her skimpy bikini. Unsatisfyingly, she also became aware that Brett's eyes were not. She walked close by him, deliberately, on her way to the pool's edge, wafting a heavy scent of Samsara in his direction, but his gaze didn't alter. His attention was focused upon Tash at the other end of the table. Laetitia made a perfect dive into the water and muttered crossly to herself as she surfaced, 'No good will come of this.' Tash needed a Desirable not a To-Die-For. Brett was a To-Die-For.

Oh, he was nice and charming and had pleasant manners and got on with everybody, but what on earth was he doing coming on to Tash? Laetitia turned over in the water and floated on her back looking up at the sky. The moon was overhead now. She fumed at it.

Brett was staring at the moon too. It looked especially bright and glowing tonight. Then he brought his eyes back to Tash. She'd been looking at him but now she quickly looked away, focusing on the game. He was attracted by her expression when she concentrated. She had wide, wonderful eyes and a face that came alive when she was thinking. 'You're beautiful,' he told her silently, 'when you're unselfconscious.'

Aware of him watching her Tash immediately became self-conscious and ducked her head so that her light brown hair fell across her eyes.

'Your go,' said Rob passing Brett the dice.

Brett tossed the dice and moved his counter, then gave an amused confident look down the table at Tash. He had landed on Entertainment.

Rob and Paul groaned. 'Not again!' said Rob. 'He never misses these.'

'Rigged,' muttered Paul.

Tash, whose turn it was to read the question, picked up a card. 'Which musical act simultaneously

held the top five positions in the U.S. singles charts?' she asked.

'The Beatles,' Brett answered without hesitation. 'March '64.' Then he looked Tash very directly in the eyes and said, ' "I Want To Hold Your Hand".'

Tash gave a little gasp. She stared at him, frozen.

He looked back at her intently. Very slowly, he began to smile, and then continued. ' "Please Please Me", "Love Me Do", "From Me To You", "She Loves You", ' he said.

Tash felt herself blushing furiously. 'Oh,' she stammered.

Christina took in this whole exchange, and gave Paul's foot a conspiratorial nudge under the table. He raised his eyebrows at her in agreement. Something was certainly going on between these two.

'Very good, very good,' sighed Rob, apparently impervious to the situation. 'Now come on, roll again.'

Brett rolled the dice again and moved his counter. It landed on Science. Tash immediately brightened, and looked up at him with a rivalrous gleam. Now you're on my turf, she thought triumphantly.

She began to read confidently. 'What is the scientific term for the substance produced in the brain — ' Suddenly she faltered, blushing again. There was a pause while the whole table waited. Lamely, avoiding Brett's eyes, she finished reading. ' ... When one human being is

attracted to another.'

Brett smiled, and then furrowed his forehead as if in deep thought. He looked at Tash gravely.

'Ah, that'd have to be — uh — steam?'

The others laughed, and Tash recovered enough to reply, without looking at the card, 'No, endorphins.'

He grinned at her and then started to unbutton his shirt. She gave him a polite sort of half-smile in return, trying as she did so to keep her gaze fixed upon his face or upon some innocent object on the stretch of table between them, shifting her eyes back rapidly from one to the other, trying to skip the sight of his shirt opening to reveal his bare chest. He was beautifully muscular, in a lean and natural kind of way. She became aware that she was nervously fingering the question cards, so she laid them down neatly and took a sip of her champagne. As she did so her eyes slid up to look at him again. He saw her glance and grinned.

Tash looked away immediately and coughed, narrowly avoiding snorting champagne bubbles out of her nose. Christina, the last of the others to still be in the game, rolled the dice and began pondering a question on geography. Tash was grateful for the diversion. It gave her a moment to think. What drew her eyes to Brett, she thought, was not his physical

appearance, though god knows it was attractive enough. It was his ease in his own body that she found so attractive. He sat at the other end of the table, the pool light rippling over his skin, not vain, nor uncomfortable, but just living in every inch of his body, and happy to be so. He wore his body like an old denim jacket, comfortable, soft to touch, every inch of it known with grace. He had probably never tripped or bumped into something in his life. Tash thought she would give anything to experience that, just for one moment.

A burst of laughter interrupted her thoughts. Christina was peeling off her shirt, looking crestfallen. Rob handed Tash the dice. It was her turn. Immediately she became business-like. She was determined not to lose. She rolled the dice confidently, but her face fell when she saw where she had landed. On Entertainment.

Now it was Brett's turn to look pleased. Okay Madame Curie, he thought, let's see how good you are on a nice little question about who played Orson Welles' mother in *Citizen Kane*. But when he turned up the card, he was disappointed. It was an easy question. He sighed, and read it out.

'What sixties American T.V. series featured a futuristic family whose spaceship became "Lost In Space"?'

The others moaned. 'Easy!' said Christina.

'Why didn't I get that?' called Laetitia, who was now floating in the pool on an inflatable lounge, with a glass of neat Stoli in her hand. 'That dice is loaded.'

Brett, surprised that Tash had not immediately replied, thought that she must have misheard him and was just about to read the question out again when he suddenly became aware that she had no idea what they were talking about. Her face had darkened with concentration. She was obviously trying to process everything she knew about old television series and he suddenly realised she didn't know very much. He felt a surge of sympathy for her. She was looking at him. He knew she was going to make a guess and he knew she was going to be wrong.

' "Star Trek".'

She was trying not to sound tentative. The others roared with laughter. Brett grinned and shook his head. He was keeping his eyes firmly fixed on her. She gave him a brave look back. Then she stood up and unbuttoned her bulky coat. It slipped off her shoulders to reveal a slim, shapely body in a short, sleeveless black dress. Brett caught his breath. Their eyes met.

The others, hushed by the din of Brett and Tash's body language, tried discreetly to look elsewhere. Laetitia, who was extremely annoyed by the turn of

events, tried to stage a diversion by drowning noisily in her vodka-filled corner of the pool. However, no one noticed her. Rob was too shocked, having finally realised what his alarm bells had been trying to tell him all night — there was something going on between his old friend Brett, and his good friend Tash. Brett and Tash were oblivious. And Paul and Christina were too involved.

For when Christina had nudged him under the table again, Paul had suddenly noticed how soft and small her feet were. Perhaps it was the moonlight, which was glowing particularly bright that night. Perhaps it was all the hormones zinging off Brett and Tash. But whatever the reason, Christina and Paul suddenly found themselves looking at each other in a way that was entirely un-flatmate-like.

Tash also noticed the moon that night, as she was clearing away the mess on the roof. It was especially large for this time of the year, and a fine mist of clouds blew across its face. Though it was awesome and distant, it seemed to her somehow kindly, looking down upon them all, on their little dramas and disasters. As Tash tried to resist the powerful attraction to Brett, perhaps the moon frowned, just a little.

She tried to focus herself on the task of cleaning

up, and not on her own disturbing feelings. 'All the rest of this evening,' a voice inside her head was saying, 'is going to be an anti-climax. Nothing is going to happen. You and he aren't — ' She stopped for a moment to find a word appropriate to the situation, ' — feasible. You aren't feasible at all. Keep busy. Do other things. Don't think about it.'

She bent over to pick up a champagne bottle when a peal of laughter alerted her and she spun around. Christina was herding the others down the staircase, Laetitia spluttering and protesting but to no avail. The door shut after them. Tash glanced frantically around the roof. Brett was sitting over on the end of the table watching her. They were alone.

There was a clatter. A bottle had slid out of her hands. She gathered the remaining two closely against her and turned around slowly to look at him. He thought she held the bottles as if they were protection. She swallowed hard, then spoke.

'Have you been looking at me?'

She was so serious standing there holding the bottles that he couldn't prevent himself from teasing her.

'Mmmm.'

'Why?'

She seemed genuinely puzzled.

'Well,' he said with a playful frown, 'it's weird,

but — I think I like you.' He couldn't stop himself from smiling a little as he spoke to her. He was thinking that he couldn't remember when he'd been in a situation with a girl where things had been so complicated.

'You don't know who I am,' she said firmly. 'I'm not your kind of person.'

He looked at her levelly. 'Why not?'

'You're the kind of guy who sat up the back of the class at school. And at lunchtimes you kissed all the glamorous girls behind the football field.'

He nodded, grinning to himself. She sure got that right.

She looked at him almost fiercely. 'I spent my lunchtimes on my own reading chemistry books. And no one noticed I was gone. So don't you think you've got the wrong person?'

'No I don't,' he was about to say and then stopped. She was looking very sad and he knew that she believed every word she was saying and that her heart was aching. She had told him her painful truth, and now she expected him to go away. He admired her grave honesty and had a sudden longing to reach back into her past and make things right.

He walked towards her.

'I had a secret crush,' he said, 'on that girl in the front row. But I could never find her at lunchtime.'

Her expression began, infinitesimally, to soften. 'You should have tried the library,' she said.

'Oh — that's where you were.' He lifted the bottles out of her arms.

She didn't notice. She was smiling up into his eyes now, but she said, 'I'm messy.'

'I'm very tidy,' he replied calmly.

'I'm too punctual.'

'I'm always late.'

'We've got nothing in common,' she insisted.

'I don't care,' he said firmly. He put his arms around her and drew her closer. She seemed to melt under his touch, dissolving into his arms. Yet she lifted her eyes to his, trembling, offering her last line of resistance.

'You're about to become some kind of T.V. star. Are you sure this new job won't change you?'

He looked into her face. He could feel that she feared being hurt. He could see that in her eyes he was everything that spelled trouble. Yet he knew, somehow, in every atom of his being, that they were destined to be together.

'Not a chance,' he said gently, and she could see that he meant it.

Slowly, very slowly, her lips moved closer to his, and finally touched, sending a shiver through both of them. They kissed.

Above them, the moon and stars heaved a great sigh of relief. Nature was back on course.

Three

WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS

ONE YEAR LATER

The courier enjoyed going to the television station. He'd already been there several times this Valentine's Day morning and he liked the bustle and the air of excitement about the place. There was always some voluptuous girl on reception who looked like she'd wandered off the set of 'Melrose Place', and who gave the impression of being deeply concerned with helping you find the person to whom you were to make your delivery. Everyone, to his eyes, seemed vitally concerned with what they were doing, and somehow, just by visiting, the courier felt that he too was part of the station's creative importance.

Of course, as the courier reminded himself, a television studio was just a factory in another form. Behind the bold, modern foyer with the lime-green feature wall and halogen track lighting, and the sweeping lines of steel and glass, there was a warren of narrow corridors lined with studios and production

offices and box-like editing rooms full of harassed people altering lights and issuing instructions and hurrying around muttering about schedules. Still, it always felt glamorous to the courier. There was the constant prospect of seeing a famous face. The first time he saw his favourite newsreader he'd had to stop himself from saying hello. The man had seemed so familiar, it was a moment before the courier realised that they'd never met.

This time he had to deliver a large bunch of red roses to Brett Flinders who hosted a music show that his daughter watched. The courier had been directed by the receptionist to a make-up room, but when he found it, Brett Flinders wasn't there. Instead, there were two young women, both standing around as if waiting for someone. One of them said, 'More roses!', and gestured vaguely towards a low table in the corner of the room on which there were at least a dozen bunches of roses, as well as a pile of cards, several bottles of champagne and a very large heart-shaped chocolate in a gold-trimmed, heart-shaped box. The courier asked if Mr Brett Flinders was about.

'I wish I knew,' answered the second young woman darkly. As she finished speaking though, Brett Flinders suddenly appeared.

'You're late,' both the women said accusingly.

'I know,' he answered, 'I know,' and smiled at them with a cheeky charm. Before the courier's impressed gaze, both women visibly melted.

'Had a meeting with Davis,' said Brett. 'Well, not a meeting, we had a Significant Encounter in the corridor. A very, very Significant Encounter,' he added and looked at the courier who was still standing there waiting for someone to relieve him of the roses. Brett took them and checked the card.

'From all the girls at Polygram Records,' he read out. 'Now I wonder what they want.' The line was a cliché but Brett Flinders had a gift for uttering obvious remarks as if nobody else had ever said them before, and he spoke in such a reflective sort of way it suggested that the girls at Polygram Records had a huge range of things they wanted from him.

Both the women giggled and the courier was grinning as he left. Brett turned to the women who were a production assistant and a make-up artist respectively.

'I just need a minute alone — ' Brett ostentatiously checked his watch, 'exactly three minutes in fact.'

He picked up his mobile and shooed them with it towards the door in a manner that was half-firm, half-teasing. 'I've got to ring Tash.' But when they had gone, he turned instead to the mirror, and looked at himself.

His appearance had changed considerably in the past year. He was still handsome, but now in a more contrived kind of way. His hair was more obviously styled; his clothes bolder and more consciously fashionable. He looked like what he strived to be — someone who had just walked off the pages of *The Face* magazine. He considered his reflection, and was pleased with it. Sensually, he ran his fingers through his hair, smiling, then widened his smile into a grimace to check his teeth. 'Teeth — good,' he thought to himself. 'Hair — unbelievable.' His confidence lifted by this ritual, he spun round in his chair, picked up the phone and dialled Rob.

When he heard Brett's voice, Rob raised his eyebrows. His office was just down the hall and he knew where Brett was but Brett was too excited to notice any irony in his friend's tone.

'Davis — ' he announced (Davis being the producer of the show), 'has just gotten off the phone from the American office. He says the New York job is looking very good. I could host the show over there and do special interviews for the network here — this could be outrageous.'

'When will you know?'

'They're going to make their final decision in a couple of weeks, but he says it feels good.'

'That's fantastic. What does Tash think?'

'I haven't told her yet,' said Brett. The production assistant had returned and was glaring at him from the doorway while at the same time leaning against the frame in what she hoped was a seductive pose. 'But I will. Got to go. Being stalked.' He grinned at the production assistant and gave her an appreciative look up and down.

An hour later, when the courier, carrying another bunch of red roses, arrived at the offices of the *Australian* newspaper, he was already missing the T.V. station. The surly security guard in the foyer of this building merely grunted something inarticulate at him as he waved him towards the lifts. And when he arrived on the editorial floor, pausing in the doorway to scan the large office, the sight that met him was decidedly unglamorous.

It looked as if a paper bomb had exploded. Piles of newspapers covered the floors and tables, leaning drunkenly, spilling over into the walkways between desks. The walls were covered with cut-out articles, bawdy cartoons, old and suggestive headlines. The basic decor of the office, where it was visible, was a kind of grey-blue, but it seemed that, over time, furniture from other floors had wandered in here, so that the filing cabinets were an array of odd shades of brown and green, and the hundred or so desks on the floor looked mismatched.

A journalist slouching his way out of the office for his hourly cigarette passed the courier and was asked for directions. He pointed across the office, in the direction of Tash.

Tash saw this, out of the corner of her eye, and looked up. Her heart leapt. She had said nothing to Brett this morning about wanting flowers, and he had given no hints. However, as this fourteenth of February was the first anniversary of the start of their relationship, she'd been wondering if he'd remember and was unable to stop herself from smiling when she saw the journalist gesturing in her direction.

As the courier approached, Tash was going through her daily regime of waiting on the phone while she was referred from one person to another at the laboratory of Dr Albert Kamins. After two 'please holds' and one muffled message that she couldn't decipher, she was finally put on to the laboratory assistant with the Sri Lankan accent who always seemed to be the last person you spoke to before you spoke to Dr Kamins. Except that she never got to speak to Dr Kamins.

'Today's the day though,' she said to herself, watching the roses approach her, 'today I speak with Dr Kamins and today,' she added cheerfully to herself as if she'd just formulated some world-shaking new equation, 'Dr Kamins speaks to me.'

At the last minute, however, the courier, who had been looking at Tash because he liked her bright eyes and the way her wide mouth smiled as she talked on the phone, walked past her. He added the roses to another desk further on which was already covered with bouquets and cards. Tash's heart sank. She absent-mindedly put her pencil behind her ear which helped encourage her brown hair to flop into her eyes. She left the usual message with the assistant with the Sri Lankan accent. She had called Dr Kamins every day for the last month. She would call him again tomorrow. Yes, Dr Kamins' office had her number, in the utterly, totally improbable eventuality that Dr Kamins should decide to return her call.

'Why are molecules drawn to one another?' was the last line on the computer screen before her. She rubbed her eyes and pushed her hair back from her forehead which made it flop even more heavily forward. 'Why are roses drawn to one another?' she asked herself, glancing towards the bouquet-laden desk. She knew the answer to that — because Desirables were drawn to one another. The desk was occupied by Helen MacMahon, the newspaper's crack political reporter. Tash glanced at her watch, shook her head firmly and went back to her article. She was nearly finished and it was a great piece. She'd shown the outline already to Harrison, the Chief-of-Staff, and

she was convinced that it deserved to be published on page three.

'Why are molecules drawn to one another? What force in the universe drives them to join together to form matter? It is fundamental questions like these that Professor Epple's research is beginning to answer, which may help us better understand the beginning of our universe and, indeed, its future.'

She spoke the words aloud softly as her fingers moved quickly across the keyboard. Every few seconds she would glance briefly towards the door of the editorial meeting room. Harrison was due out any minute now.

He appeared just as she was pressing the print button and she dashed down the aisles between the desks towards him with a speed and decisiveness that invariably reminded Helen MacMahon, who was just then returning to her own flower-laden desk, of a missile homing in upon its target. Like the other journalists, Helen stopped to watch the ensuing confrontation. She knew that Trevellyn would lose but still, the unexpected can happen and if history was going to be made this afternoon, if Tash Trevellyn was going to persuade Harrison to put her story earlier in the issue than page seven, Helen MacMahon was going to be here to watch it.

Harrison's pace visibly accelerated when he saw

Tash. He irritably tried to ward her off by barking at her, 'Page seven.'

Tash was not quelled by his antagonism. 'It's a good story, it's a page three!'

'It's an egghead piece,' Harrison snapped back at her. 'You're lucky I'm running it at all.'

'With respect, sir, it's very important — ' Tash began but Harrison cut her off.

'Is it about sex? Is it about my car engine? Is it a cure for cancer?' He thought of adding, 'Does it have anything to do with football, cricket, or even — at a stretch — tennis?' but decided against it. Trevellyn was so determined to foist her mind-numbing science stories on an utterly uninterested world that he suspected she'd find some way of linking the mutual attraction of molecules to a major sport if he gave her the opportunity. 'No!' he finished firmly, answering his own question before she could think of another argument. 'Page seven.'

He stormed off leaving Tash glaring after him. She turned to the office. 'Right,' she said. 'The future of fuel injection would be page two. The future of the universe — forget it.'

Helen MacMahon looked up at her dryly. 'You got the future of the universe again? I wonder why we bother doing a political section at all.' The other journalists, chuckling, returned to their work, their

entertainment over. They were mostly sympathetic to Tash but completely unsurprised by what had taken place. As she trudged back to her desk, Tash's gaze fell upon the flowers and Valentines covering MacMahon's desk. Her eyes met those of the political journalist.

Helen MacMahon was a slender, elegant woman in her early fifties with a cool, confident manner and a near unshakeable composure. She was always impeccably dressed in a tailored suit and blouse. Down through the years observant politicians had noted that when they were telling her especially big lies, Helen MacMahon's expression would never alter but she had a habit of glancing down at her impeccable outfit and removing, or appearing to remove, a thread or speck of ash from off a sleeve. She lived for politics.

'Beautiful roses,' said Tash admiringly. 'I love red roses.'

Helen MacMahon had instantly appraised her floral tributes in terms of cost and status the moment she returned to her desk, and could tell you exactly which bunches came from mere suburban florists, and which came from florists so nervewrackingly fashionable that their window displays consisted solely of arrangements of distressed driftwood accompanied by the occasional out-sized bean pod.

However she had not considered her flowers by type and colour, and now she looked at them and noted that yes, they were roses and they were red.

Inevitably Tash had compared what she'd received (one small card from a publicist who often worked on science conventions and nothing-at-all from Brett) with the bounty on Helen MacMahon's desk. She reflected upon the relative importance the world gave to political journalists who reported ephemeral events (mostly forgotten a week later, even by the participants) as compared to science journalists like herself, who were often reporting upon developments which could change people's lives and, sometimes, the future of the entire world. Despite her daily battles with Harrison, Tash could not understand why the newspaper acted as if her work was irrelevant. She was convinced that the public would read about science if they could be brought to realise its importance. The fault lay partly with scientists who weren't used to having to communicate with non-professionals. Dr Albert Kamins, for example, had never returned a single phone call even though she had been ringing him for a month. She knew why Dr Kamins refused to talk to journalists. He thought that the popular press trivialised scientific research and was only interested in it if it involved making lots of money or sex. But his research was

important, Tash thought, and public money — taxpayers' money — was used to fund it. If she was a political journalist like Helen MacMahon, she would use her status and influence at the paper to write an article proposing that the Government should require scientists, as part of the conditions under which they received their funding, to assist the press in educating the general public about their research.

However she knew that if she, Tash, were to propose such an article, Harrison would roll his eyes, turn red in the face and go off muttering about having to employ idealistic eggheads when what he really needed was another police roundsman and someone to do detailed articles on real estate. This revived her anger towards her Chief-of-Staff and she stabbed at her blotter with her pen, the impact causing a stack of *New Scientist* magazines to tumble across her desk.

Helen MacMahon raised her eyebrows. She had been regarding her young colleague and thinking that Tash Trevellyn would benefit from being a little more laid-back, more casual. Her zeal made people like Harrison feel uncomfortable. Office gossips said that Trevellyn was over-intense because her romance with the T.V. talk show host, Brett Flinders, was going sour.

A year ago, when Flinders had just arrived in Sydney and their relationship had begun, he had been an unknown, whereas Tash Trevellyn was an

established journalist. Now, however, the situation was very different. Brett Flinders had become a star. His music/pop culture/talk show was a hit. Every visiting and local performer, author and all-purpose celebrity wanted to be interviewed by Brett Flinders. Brad Pitt had been. Björk was coming. On television he was relaxed, easy, calm, always interested in his guests. His face was often in press photographs of premieres and openings. Helen MacMahon had seen him at some of these events and she could understand how the gossip had come about. There was quite a contrast between Brett Flinders, always stylishly dressed, charming and charismatic, and Tash Trevellyn, standing before her now with her hair falling all over her face and a pencil most unattractively tucked behind her ear. It was true that Tash could be a very striking woman — when she was interested in something and kept the pencils out of her hair. But the women whom Helen MacMahon had seen hanging around Brett Flinders in his public appearances were acknowledged beauties: models, television actresses, publicity-loving socialites.

Nonetheless Helen did not entirely believe the gossip. Most of the newspaper staff were men and in Helen's experience, men nearly always ascribed women's behaviour to sex. Either they were not getting enough of it, or they were nymphomaniacs. If

they were succeeding in their careers, it was because they were sleeping their way up, or if they were clever, serious women like Tash Trevellyn, it was assumed that they were concentrating on their work to console themselves for a broken heart. It often seemed as if women could never win. But Helen MacMahon was contemptuous of self-pity and knew that the world was also difficult for young men. Tash Trevellyn was a clever, capable young woman who was going to have to work out her own destiny. Helen MacMahon had battled her way to the top and had better things to do than stand around, lending out shoulders for weaker women to lean upon.

No roses were delivered to Tash that afternoon. While Brett was leaning back having his make-up done, in preparation for the taping of his show, it did occur to him that he ought to send Tash some flowers, but that reminded him that he had to talk to her about New York. The make-up artist saw his cloud of bad aura and asked if anything was wrong. He shook his head, and put the thought out of his mind. A few minutes later he was in the studio, giving Rob, who directed his show, a wave. He usually just sat on the sofa but this time, as the floor manager was counting down, he suddenly lay back on it with his arms folded behind his head as if he was in his own lounge room. When his cue came, he burst into a dazzling smile.

Tash spent the last part of the day hanging by the water cooler, ostensibly getting a drink but actually watching Marx, the sub-editor, who had her story on his computer screen and was editing it. She didn't trust him with her copy. He felt her presence behind him like a hovering mosquito, and it made him edgy. He came upon the word 'molecules' in her article for the third time, and, for the sake of variety, changed it to 'atoms.' Tash pounced on him from a distance of two metres.

'It's *molecules*, not atoms!' she exclaimed righteously.

'It's punchier,' said Marx, wishing she would go away. As far as he was concerned, the only people who would read this story were high school science teachers and a few poor unfortunate commuters whose train or bus services were delayed, so that they were obliged to read every article in the paper to pass the time. Marx didn't care about the high school teachers but he felt a sense of responsibility towards the delayed commuters forced to read the article through no fault of their own. He knew that they would feel more comfortable reading about 'atoms' as opposed to 'molecules'. Molecules reminded him of germs. Atoms sounded more scientific. But Trevellyn was now hanging right over his shoulder.

'Molecules and atoms are very different things,'

she was saying. 'It's not scientifically correct.'

So let 'em sue, thought Marx, but he knew when he was beaten and was starting to go back through the text when he heard Helen MacMahon's voice calling out, 'Hold everything!'

Both Marx and Tash swung around. The normally imperturbable MacMahon strode into the office, flung herself down at her desk, shoved aside a bundle of Valentines and began to type furiously. All the other journalists gathered around. Harrison appeared from his office.

'The Health Minister's just resigned,' announced MacMahon without moving her eyes from her screen.

'Any sex in it?' enquired Harrison, whose mind was doing a familiar computation. Sudden Unexpected Resignation of Senior Minister equals Big Story. Sudden Unexpected Resignation of Senior Minister with Sexual Element involved equals Very Big Story plus Guaranteed Lead Stories for Rest of Week.

'Yes!' said MacMahon.

HEALTH MINISTER'S PLAYBOY PLAYMATE TELLS ALL, thought Harrison happily. He hurried over to Marx and began to shuffle pages on the computer.

'Move page one to page three,' he instructed Marx. He felt a familiar pair of brown eyes boring

into him and looked up to see Tash. She opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off.

'Page twelve,' he said, in a tone that implied 'lucky not to be dropped'.

Tash sighed and trudged back to her desk. Another day of fulfilling journalism.

As dusk fell over Sydney, Brett was interviewing (and flirting with) a sexy black female singer who was the Latest Thing on the dance charts, and Tash was walking home.

Her flat, like Brett's, was on the inner city peninsula, a jumble of art deco apartment blocks, cafés, and nightclubs. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood were mostly either young singles her own age, or elderly people on their own who'd been living there since the thirties and forties, when the area first became bohemian. Lately, however, Tash had noticed wistfully a growing number of young couples with babies in the area.

Their plans for Valentine's night were not exactly what Tash would have hoped for. They were going to a party on a ferry, a record launch for the aforementioned singer. It would be, according to Brett, one of *the* events of the year, but Tash secretly would have preferred dinner in a quiet restaurant. Nonetheless, she was determined that the evening —

their first anniversary — would be special. She had bought a black lace corset with suspenders especially for this occasion, which she took from its tissue wrappings and held up against her to assess the effect. It did not somehow feel right. She remembered that it had seemed to suit her in the shop and now she attempted to pose seductively but it made her feel worse. 'Ridiculous,' she said, looking at herself. She realised what her reflection reminded her of, and sighed. Gay men dressed up in women's lacy lingerie on the Brothers For Bondage float in the annual Mardi Gras parade.

Once that unfortunate image occurred to her, she was never going to get it right. The green dress she'd intended to wear seemed suddenly frumpy. It would be too blowy on the harbour to wear her wrapover skirt. Her other favourite dress only looked good with a particular pair of shoes and after turning out her cupboard and dragging various items from under the bed and from the corner by the dressing table, she remembered that she had taken that particular pair of shoes in for re-heeling and hadn't gotten around to collecting them yet. By this time it was getting so late that she realised there was no option except to wear the black dress which Brett had already seen her in a number of times. Still, he liked her in black. She'd been wearing a black dress that first night they met ...

Tash looked at her watch. Brett was due to pick her up any minute now. She slipped on the black dress and started to fix her hair.

Brett, however, was at that moment engaged in a mutually flattering conversation with the much-mentioned female singer, at the post-show drinks. When she finally withdrew to re-costume herself for the launch, he did, to give him credit, look at his watch, and start to make his way towards the door. But his movement was observed by Vanessa, the production assistant, and Debbie, the make-up artist, who sprung upon him from either side.

'You haven't spoken to us all evening,' said Debbie, pouting.

'We've got some gossip for you,' said Vanessa, pressing another champagne into his hand. Brett glanced over to the door, then back at the two upturned faces focused so brightly on him. Just one more drink, he thought. And what was this gossip anyhow ... ?

Forty minutes later, Tash was sitting in the lounge room tapping her foot impatiently against the leg of the coffee table. 'He's late,' she said to herself, 'he's always late.' But that set off a memory. *'I'm usually late.' 'I'm too punctual.' 'We've got nothing in common.'* Her eyes went around the room as she recalled what else they'd said. *'I'm messy.' 'I'm very*

tidy.' There were shoes, newspapers, a pile of science magazines, coffee cups, glasses, several sweaters and the skirt she'd worn yesterday scattered about the room. Through the bedroom door she could see the debris from her rapid changes of clothes. She got up and began to dash around, scooping up the clothes and stuffing them quickly out of sight, making herself hot and even more irritable in the process, and in reality only rearranging the mess. When the buzzer to the front door finally sounded, she had whipped herself into a frenzy. She marched down the hall to press the door release, then paused to try and calm her temper. Don't start an argument, she thought. Not tonight. She took a deep breath, and opened the door.

On the doorstep stood Brett, handsome, smiling, his arms full of red roses. He ran his hand through his hair and grinned cheekily at her. He looked her up and down.

'Ooh, baby,' he said appreciatively.

Tash's face softened. All the worry of the day fell away from her. He had remembered. She gave him a beautiful smile. He held the roses out to her, and pulled her to him, relieved. He had half-expected Tash to step back and ask accusingly, 'Why are you so late?' But she closed her eyes and as their lips met something else happened. Brett felt a throb of pleasure that made him move in closer to her and tighten his

arms about her, but also something more. A feeling that he'd never had with anyone else but Tash, which made him feel vulnerable and happy all at the same time, as if he was completely exposed to her and perfectly content all at once. The feeling was a shock and yet quite familiar, as if this was how things were meant to be. There was nothing between them, she knew everything about him and he was drawn into her, as if they were inside each other's skins.

They paused for breath. Tash turned her face up to him teasingly.

'Haven't you got something to tell me?' she said.

Brett froze. New York, he thought. How did she know? He stalled for a moment. 'Like what?' he said.

'Happy anniversary, genius.'

He breathed again, in relief. 'Happy anniversary,' he said.

She picked up the roses and buried her face in the petals, drawing in the perfume. 'They're beautiful. I'll just put them in water.' She ran off to the kitchen.

Brett sagged against the doorpost. Thank you, florists everywhere, he thought. He smoothed his hair, straightened his jacket. He did not want an angry Tash tonight.

In the kitchen Tash was happily anticipating coming home after the party and arranging her flowers in her favourite vase and then of waking in the

morning, with Brett in bed beside her, and watching the early sunlight spill through the windows over the roses. She was in the final stages of this scenario when it occurred to her that Brett might want to go back to his place after the party and she sighed as she turned off the tap.

She did not like Brett's apartment. It was striking and well-designed with smooth lines, every fitting flush into the wall, all the switches recessed. Nothing anywhere so vulgar as a knob. But it was hard and bare. The floors were granite, and there was an eighteen-foot long granite dining table that got so cold in winter you couldn't rest your arms on it. Pride of place in the lounge room was held by an acid yellow Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chair, Brett's prized possession, though Tash suspected he's never heard of Mies van der Rohe until the day he received the itemised receipt from the interior designers he hired. They charged him a fortune, and what they mostly did was take away things, leaving in their place that most precious of modern design elements — space.

Tash longed for a bit of clutter to soften all this sparseness but Brett himself was so tidy that whatever she left lying around — her shoes, a sweater, a newspaper — immediately took on the self-conscious look of an object in an advertisement. You expected any minute to have a close-up on the brand name and

Tash was worried that *her* brand names would be the wrong ones. It was not homey. Brett's stainless steel Alessi coffee cups shone back at Tash a reflection of her puffy face and messy hair in the morning that was the last thing she wanted to see. She preferred her own colourful china mugs. And whereas Tash's fridge was always jam-packed with healthy food, home-made soups, and little bits of left-overs in Tupperware containers, Brett's fridge contained only a bottle of Stoli, a jar of capers, and, held under a neat brushed-metal magnet on the fridge door, a selection of home-delivery menus from gourmet food bars. The apartment was not welcoming to Tash. She would never want to live there.

On the other hand, Brett clearly did not want to live at her place. She had been thinking a great deal about the two of them living together lately. In the year that had passed since that first Valentine's night, Paul and Christina had become a couple in every sense of the word. Not only did they share an apartment and most of their opinions, they also now shared a bank account, the use of Paul's car, and their families on Christmas and major holidays. Whereas she and Brett didn't even share coathangers.

And last month, in the mail, had come the embossed invitation formally announcing Paul and Christina's impending wedding. Their relationship had

moved to the next stage. Tash and Brett's had not.

Tash was tired of commuting between their two places. If they lived together, Brett would not have had to come by her place to collect her tonight. Brett himself, when she raised it with him, would usually only make a joke about their contrasted housekeeping styles.

'Of course,' said Laetitia, when Tash had raised it with her, 'you must get a new, completely separate place and move into it together.' She had not, however, said this with much conviction and, immediately afterwards, had found a reason to change the topic. Tash noticed lately that this often happened when she talked to Laetitia about Brett. Laetitia would listen to what she had to say and then, just at the point at which it would have been expected that she make a comment, Laetitia would switch somehow to talking about something else.

'I complain to Laetitia too much about him, I guess,' she said to herself, unwrapping the cellophane from the flowers. 'I must stop that. We're very different people, there are bound to be some difficulties.' The feeling between them when they kissed, she knew that had been real.

As she sank the bunch of roses into the sink full of water, a card fell onto the floor. Smiling, she bent to pick it up. It read, 'Happy St Valentine's Day, Brett,

from all the girls at Polygram Records.'

Her mood deflated in a second. All her happy anticipation had been based on a lie. He'd been running late and had just grabbed some of his rejects as a last minute gesture to stop her complaining. They were beautiful roses. But it was not actually the roses that she had longed for. It was the feeling that someone felt she was special enough to think of her. Brett had not even thought enough to remove the card. She felt tired and disappointed. She screwed up the card and dropped it in the bin. Brett called out, 'Babe, the boat leaves at eight.' She stormed out through the front door where he was waiting, and said, 'I was ready an hour ago.'

Brett stared after her, confused. 'What have I done now?' he thought. He pulled the door shut behind them, and followed her down the stairs.

In the taxi Brett noticed that the driver was looking at him in the rear-view mirror and realised that he'd been recognised. Although they were late he reminded himself that he must not harass the driver to go faster or find short cuts. Taxi drivers talk. Rude celebrities were a favourite topic. Celebrities having fights with their girlfriends would, Brett knew, be an even more favoured topic and it was exactly how you started to find your name in the gossip columns in the wrong

way. He could feel Tash beside him becoming pent up, about to burst out with whatever it was he'd done to offend her. She was looking fixedly away from him. He reached out, picked up her hand and began to caress her fingertips. She continued however to gaze out the window and he breathed a sigh of relief when they reached the pier.

But as the taxi pulled up, the ferry was blaring its horn to leave. Brett's face darkened as he threw some notes at the driver. This was the coolest party in the city tonight, and they were going to miss it.

Tash saw this look. Great, she thought. It's going to be all my fault, we'll have a huge argument, and that'll be the end of Valentine's Day and our anniversary. Brett turned to her to say something, but she bolted out of the cab, and hurtled down the pier, yelling and waving her arms as if there was a volcano about to explode behind them and this was the last boat off the island.

'Stop! Stop! Wait for us!' she screamed.

Brett cringed in embarrassment, but one of the deckhands untying the final rope looked up and paused. Tash tore up the gangplank onto the ferry, and Brett loped behind her, conscious that there were dozens of people on the deck above them, holding their glasses of champagne, and gazing down in amusement upon this major drama which Tash had

managed to stage.

They paused on the lower deck. He smoothed his hair, straightened his jacket carefully, giving her a dark look. She was flushed. Her hair was untidy. Her handbag on its long strap had swung around and now hung in front of her like the sporran on a Scotsman's kilt. Not for the first time, he wished that Tash could be less intense.

Tash had expected him to be pleased she had made the boat wait, but she saw now she was wrong. She could do nothing right. She looked at him, her face set, and Brett realised that if he did not do something there would be a public fight. The whole music industry would be at this party. It was not the place.

'Let's have a good time tonight,' he said quickly.

'Of course,' said Tash.

That was neutral at least, thought Brett. They headed to the upper deck.

The crowd swallowed them like the jaws of a huge animal. The music was thumping. Brett could see that everyone was here — the foxy, the funky, the fashionable and the freeloaders. He loved them all. He lived for these events. In a single year, he had become the darling of this world. People showered kisses upon him, pressed his hand. He smiled for the camera, as

What magazine snapped his picture. It was going to be a fantastic night.

It was horrific, thought Tash. The minute they entered people flocked around Brett. She was of no interest to them and soon found herself squeezed out of the way, and left on her own in a little island in the crowd. Next to her, she could see a large poster showing the singer whose new album was being promoted that night. Her name, or perhaps it was the title of the album — Tash, who had never heard of either before tonight, had no way of knowing — was given in scrawly letters down one side of the poster. Out of sheer habitual scientific curiosity, Tash squinted slightly to try and read the name but as she tilted her head someone knocked into her, sending her another three feet back into the crowd. They did not even apologise. What was wrong with these people?

She looked over, and saw Brett and the singer exchanging greetings as if they hadn't seen each other in years. Tash watched Brett for a moment. His manner was relaxed, easy. She could see he was charming everyone within two metres. Brett was wonderful at parties, managing to make each person he met feel like he or she was the one whom Brett Flinders had really hoped to see here tonight. Except for herself. She felt like a leper. She looked around the crowd for a friendly face, but it was as if she were invisible.

I knew this would happen, she thought. Brett will be treated like the guest of honour and I will be envying the waiters because at least they've got something to do. Why do I come?

Just at that point, as if it was fate's way of reminding her that things can always get worse, she saw Colette, a bimbo model who was always hanging around Brett.

Colette in a skin-tight, low-cut black dress, with her blonde hair, model-perfect face, model-perfect figure, and model-perfect legs. An instant later Colette saw her and, as Tash watched (she could almost hear the cogs whirring), Colette immediately looked around for Brett.

Laetitia always said that David Attenborough ought to come and film Colette for one of his wildlife documentaries. 'All those tigers and sharks about to leap upon their prey look positively laid-back compared to her,' she'd say. 'She could smell a man half a kilometre away in a hurricane.' Usually Tash would laugh, but tonight she didn't feel like laughing. Colette had gone to Brett's side and was monopolising him. A photographer appeared and Colette kissed Brett as the photographer took the snap. Tash turned to walk away and the movement caught Brett's eye. He smiled, and motioned to her to get a drink, go mix. She rolled her eyes. *A bunch of over-grown*

teenagers in over-priced clothes. This is not my scene. Irritated, Brett returned to his conversation with Colette.

Colette had noticed their silent exchange. She gave Tash a cool little look and intensified her flirting with Brett, laughing at his every joke, tossing her blonde hair and sparkling under his attention. The message to Tash was clear. *This is my scene, darling. I can mix it here. I am a much more suitable partner for Brett Flinders than you.*

People were looking up and Tash saw, on the T.V. monitors mounted above the crowd, Brett's show coming on. He was sitting on the couch with the female singer, and he gave the appearance of being intensely interested in her. He touched her arm flirtatiously, made some quick quip, and they both laughed.

It was, Tash thought, ironically Brett's ability to make everyone else feel special that made her, by comparison, feel less so. His apparent intimacy with complete strangers seemed somehow to devalue their own.

As Tash looked over at him, she saw that he and Colette were watching the show. Brett said something funny on screen and Colette murmured something in his ear and he grinned. The sight worried her. There was something different about Brett lately, something

he was keeping from her.

A man going by with drinks in his hands forced his way past Tash. She looked around in surprise as he bumped heavily against her and then pushed past, again without apologising. When she looked back towards Brett and Colette, they were gone. I knew it, she thought. She moved through the crowd, looking for them.

The top deck was empty and in near-darkness as she came up the stairs. It overlooked the party and she peered down at the crowd below. There was no sign of Brett and Colette. The noise of the party was more distant up here. Above was the moon, almost full, shining silent and silver onto the harbour. Just like a year ago, this same night. Her eyes filled with tears. She wiped them away angrily. Jesus, she thought, do *not* cry.

Tash took a deep breath, trying to steady herself, when suddenly she heard laughter and realised that some people were coming up the stairs. The last thing she wanted was to be found crying at this party. Tash looked around for another exit, saw that there wasn't one, and pressed back into the shadows.

'You're a big liar,' purred a female voice, giggling, and Brett and Colette walked out onto the deck. They leant against the rail, looking out at the water.

Tash was mortified. She did not want to give

Colette the satisfaction of catching her with a tear-stained face, but it was more humiliating to be stuck here, listening. She was about to announce herself when she heard Brett's familiar voice say, 'Looks like I might be going to New York.' Tash froze.

'New York! Really?' said Colette. She was immediately interested.

'They're looking for a new host for the show over there. They've asked to see my tape.'

'When will you find out?'

Tash was aware of nothing but shock. This all seemed to be happening to someone else. Brett was telling Colette, 'The end of the month.'

'Is that why things seem so tense between you and Tash at the moment?'

Tash felt a spurt of anger. 'Oh,' she thought, 'the old I-understand-you-better-than-your-girlfriend-does routine.' And she expected that Brett would say something like, 'I didn't want to tell her until it was definite.' That would be Brett, always eager to postpone a difficult situation. But Brett replied, 'Oh, things are bad between me and Tash anyway. I haven't even told her about New York. She doesn't know.'

Tash stepped out of the shadows and, struggling for dignity, walked past them to the stairs, keeping her gaze set forward. Once she was by them, she started

to run. Behind her, she heard Brett exclaim and call out her name.

Brett had a flash of Tash's white face. He heard himself shout and called out her name, hurrying after her, but she had started to run and before he could catch her, she was clattering down the stairs. He glanced back towards Colette, registering that her expression was satisfied, then hurried down the stairs after Tash.

She was pushing her way quickly through the crowd. Brett followed her but people were turning to him, saying 'Brett, mate!' 'Hey, Brett!' 'Hi, man!'. He was forced to stop, grin, wave, indicate he'd be back in a minute, trying not give the impression that he and his girlfriend were having a fight. When he got close enough he stretched out and grabbed Tash by the arm and half-led, half-pushed her further up the deck away from the crowd, trying at the same time to keep his face and manner relaxed as if to say, 'Hey, it's such a crush, we're just trying to stay together.'

Tash was pulling away from him. She knew he was conscious of the crowd and in thirty seconds she had gone from misery to rage. All he cares about is his goddamned image, she thought.

Brett saw her seething face, and the minute they were out of hearing range, swung her round to face him.

'I don't want to talk about this in front of two

hundred people,' he hissed at her.

'Oh, why worry now?' she sneered. 'You just told intimate details of our private life to that bimbo. We may as well hire a publicist!'

Her eyes were stinging with hot tears. 'Why didn't you tell me?'

Brett looked around desperately, what was his answer? Because it was such a long shot. I meant to tell you, I just hadn't got around to it. I was trying to find the right time. You get miserable, you get angry. It's all such a drama. I don't even know if we should move in together, let alone move to New York together. He looked at her, ready to explode in front of everyone, regardless of the damage to his career, and he felt himself becoming angry too.

'Because I didn't want a scene like this,' he said.

Tash felt herself nearly shaking with frustration. 'I'm not angry because you're going to New York,' she said. 'I'm angry because you confide in Colette before you tell me!'

She turned to walk away but he pulled her back. This was typical Tash. Always right about everything. Always the one in judgment.

'Maybe,' he said to her, 'I can talk to Colette because she doesn't criticise me all the time. Maybe I can have a good time with her because she's not so uptight.'

'Uptight!' She tried to shake her arm free. 'Who

wouldn't be uptight? You're always chatting someone up, or forgetting our dates. You surround yourself with mindless sycophants. You're consumed by that pathetic program. It's only television, Brett, not world politics. You're just a glorified C.D. salesman.'

Even as she was saying it, she knew she should not have added that last sentence, but all the day's cumulative slights and disappointments were building up in her. Her article dumped for a cheap bit of sensationalism; second-hand roses on their first anniversary, and Brett thinking all these glitzy people were so important.

Further down the deck a few people were looking at them and not trying to hide that they were doing so. It must be blatantly obvious that they were having a huge fight, Brett thought, and the realisation made him even angrier. He snapped.

'I'm sick of apologising for what I do. So what if you don't think I'm a real journalist. So what if you think these people are shallow. This is my job, and I don't need you to look down on me for it.'

'I don't!' she cried. 'I just don't let you walk all over me. I expect better from you.'

'Well I'm sorry I don't live up to your standards,' he sneered. Then he paused and looked at her. 'I don't want to do this any more,' he said. 'It's just too hard.'

'Fine,' she said defiantly. They stared at each

other, almost surprised for a second at where they had arrived. Then Tash's eyes filled with tears.

'What happened to you?' she asked. 'What's changed you?'

'I'm tired of trying to be what you want me to be. You want me to be someone I'm not. You want me to be *you*.'

The ferry's engines cut out and their voices rang out clearly in the sudden silence. Months of frustration welled up in Tash and spilled over.

'I wish you could be me, so you could see how it feels for once. I wish I could be you — so I could show you what an idiot you've become!'

There was a rumble of thunder overhead. Brett saw with mortification that people were craning to look at them. Tash had realised what the silence meant. The ferry was docking. A gangplank was being put out for a smartly-dressed man who was waving his mobile phone cheerfully and calling out to somebody on board that it was lucky he'd had it with him. 'Missed you at the quay!'

A second later Tash rushed past him just as he was about to step onto the gangplank. Startled, he looked at her. Brett was conscious of the two deckhands glancing at him. He avoided their eyes. They pulled up the gangplank.

On the wharf, Tash's tears were streaming. She

felt that something was slipping away, that events had taken a turn she hadn't wanted. Was this how it would end? She turned and looked over her shoulder at Brett. Their eyes met. His face was cold and furious. He looked at her for a few seconds longer, and then turned and walked away.

Above them, the moon slipped into cloud, and there was another low rumble of thunder. Nature was not happy. This was not at all what she had planned.

Four

TOTAL MAKEOVER

Tash and Laetitia's favourite café in Paddington was famous for its citrus seed cake. It was called Bryony's Citrus Heaven Seed Cake after — Tash and Laetitia suspected — a former girlfriend of the proprietor (it had never seemed diplomatic to ask). However, as Laetitia said, her relationship with this famous dessert was a bit like her relationship with the Himalayas. She was glad they existed but she didn't expect to have contact with them on a regular basis. Tash had one day calculated the kilojoule content of one slice of citrus seed cake and converted this into how many additional minutes they would have to stay in the gym working off those four layers of cake interspersed with crème frâiche, lime custard, and something very delicious subtly flavoured with liqueur. The contrast between how long it would take to eat a slice of Bryony's Citrus Heaven, as compared to how long it would take to exercise it off, had been sobering. Usually when they arrived at the café, Tash and Laetitia registered that Bryony's Citrus Heaven

was under its glass cover in its place of honour, and thereafter ignored it.

On this particular Saturday morning, however, Laetitia had thought on no less than three occasions of ordering a slice of the café's famous cake, because Tash was sitting opposite her with her head in her hands and every so often issuing a remark like: 'I'm glad it's over.' 'I feel like a load has been taken off my shoulders.' 'He wasn't the right person for me.' And, 'We're just too different.'

Laetitia would nod patiently at these pronouncements and in between think of Bryony's Citrus Heaven. Finally, to save both her sanity and her figure, she pulled out a newspaper and suggested brightly, as a diversion, that they consult their horoscopes.

'First, *moi*,' she said, turning to the relevant page. 'Right: "Pisces — more of the same. Romance — get a good book. Health — you will trip or fall." Well. A big week ahead for me.' That was a fat lot of good, she thought. 'Now you,' she said.

She hoped that Julietta, who wrote the astrology column, might have something optimistic to say like, 'A handsome, responsible, family-loving stranger with strong professional interests similar to your own is about to enter your life,' or even something bland like, 'Although you are presently unhappy, you will soon

realise that you have made a wise choice.'

Laetitia really did think Tash had made a wise choice but knew it was too soon to tell her so. She was convinced that once Tash was through her initial heartbreak, she would realise it herself. It was a matter now of getting through the heartbreak. Laetitia scanned the column for Julietta's prediction for Capricorn, hoping for something appropriate. Instead, to her surprise, the prediction for Capricorn read rather as if Julietta had had too many gins or whatever it was astrologers drank prior to settling down to write the columns.

'Hey,' she said, 'listen to this! "Capricorn — the extremely rare position of the moon in your sign this month signals momentous change. The universe — it's trying to tell you something. Romance — your wishes come true." Wow! What have you wished for lately?'

She was hoping that Tash had wished to meet a handsome, responsible, family-loving stranger with strong professional interests similar to her own.

Tash merely shrugged and said, 'I think about 3 a.m. this morning, I wished that I could stop crying.'

From the state of her eyes, Laetitia knew this was true.

'Don't worry,' she said, 'he's probably feeling just as bad this morning.'

At that moment, however, Brett was smiling brilliantly. Unnoticed by either of the women, he walked past the café in which Laetitia and Tash were sitting, and greeted Rob with their special handshake, which was a rather complicated version of a high five, with several variations and additions. He looked cheerful. However, it was only when Rob turned away to walk ahead of him that Brett let his face fall. Now he looked tired and depressed.

The street was busy with Saturday morning shoppers. People glanced at Brett, recognising him from T.V., but he was oblivious to them. Brett shot a look at Rob.

'You witness the Valentine's Day massacre last night, along with everyone else?' he asked.

'No, I didn't,' Rob lied, embarrassed, 'but — ah — someone mentioned it.'

'That's it. Finish. End. It's over,' said Brett. 'Man, I won't do that again in a hurry. Getting into a relationship with a woman these days is like getting into a cab with a driver who doesn't speak English. You tell them where you want to go when you start off, and they nod and smile and you think they've understood. Next thing you look up, and you're in Moving In Street. Or Having A Baby Street. And you say, hey, I never wanted to go here. Then they start yelling at you in a language you don't understand. I

tell you, from now on, I'm walking.'

Rob nodded sympathetically, but he was thinking that this all sounded a bit like a prepared speech. Well, thought Rob, there was one thing Brett had got out of his relationship with Tash. He was much more articulate. In the old days in Melbourne when they'd first met, Brett's vocabulary was just a few 'Wows', 'Greats' and 'Fabulous band' or 'Total dogs'. Then he'd just been an unknown announcer on a community radio station with an enormous knowledge of music but few on-air skills. He had come a long way and it looked as if he was going to go a lot further. It did not occur to Rob, however, to think of saying any of this to Brett. He merely continued nodding sympathetically as they walked past the window of a clothes shop.

The shop, in fact, was called Wild Thing, and specialised in very small items of women's clothing made from very expensive pieces of leather. In the window stood Colette, trying to decide between a black leather bustier, and a snakeskin halter top. Her brow was furrowed by the challenge of this decision, when suddenly — she froze. Primeval instincts were activated in her brain. There was a stirring somewhere in the ancestral forest. Her eyes darted about, and she caught sight of the back of Brett's head disappearing past the window.

She snapped into action. Stuffing the clothes back onto the rack, she hurtled out of the door of the shop. She fought her way through the crowd, pushing people out of the way. Her green stretch mini-skirt worked its way up her thighs, and she wrenched it down as she ran. Finally she overtook Brett and Rob on the outside, and slowed her gait instantly to a smooth sashay. She turned her head as if to look in a shop window, and then said, in a surprised tone, 'Oh — Brett, Rob. Hi!'

Rob had a feeling that Colette's sudden appearance before them was as thoroughly planned and rehearsed as Brett's speech. She stuck with them as they crossed the street towards the markets. Brett had fallen back slightly and was putting on his dark glasses. Rob switched to 'chat' mode, talking animatedly to Colette as they walked along with Brett.

Given the nature of the inner city, and the particular nature of Paddington on a Saturday, it was inevitable that these two groups would run in to each other, which is exactly what was about to happen.

Paddington on a Saturday was really hell on earth, thought Laetitia, as she and Tash fought their way through the crowded markets. Unsmiling young fashion designers, shielded from the sun with elaborate hats and sunglasses, jostled for stall space with middle-aged macrame craftswomen, and

everybody looked like it was too early and too bright for them to be up. Surely there's a limit to the amount of scented candles and windchimes the world needs, she thought. And it should be a very small limit.

She returned with enthusiasm to her diatribe about Brett.

'Men like Brett will be extinct in one generation,' she pronounced.

'I would have thought they'd be propagating themselves stupid,' said Tash dryly.

'Not in this age of contraception. They're missing the crucial commitment gene. No commitment — no kids; no kids — and you've bred yourself out of the gene pool.' Laetitia smiled with satisfaction. 'Every time I look into the eyes of a louse, I think, "Evolution's got you marked, buddy." '

Tash laughed lamely, and Laetitia looked at her with concern. 'What are you going to do tonight?' she said.

'Oh, I think I'll buy a family-size pizza and eat myself to death,' sighed Tash.

'Don't do that. It's a full moon — a very bad time to eat alone. I'll come and eat half.'

'Okay,' said Tash reluctantly.

'And I'll bring a bottle of wine. No — I'll bring two.'

Tash smiled, and they kissed goodbye, and

Laetitia walked off. Tash paused on the footpath to cross the street, and as she did, she caught a glimpse of a familiar profile, dark hair, distinctive line of chin, in the crowd on the other side. It was Brett. Rob was beside him. Brett's head was lowered. To Tash, studying him hungrily, he looked pale and tired and unhappy and her feelings immediately softened.

She was about to cross over to him when she saw Colette emerge from the crowd beside him. She was laughing, and leant close to Brett to show him something she had bought. Brett smiled.

Tash stood frozen for a moment. Then, as tears filled her eyes, she turned away and, lowering her head, walked determinedly to the far side of the road and down the street, till she was lost from sight.

Afterwards they both remembered looking down upon themselves as they slept. The sun had sunk beneath the city skyline. It was dusk and Tash saw herself lying on her bed where she'd cried herself to sleep in rage and exhaustion. She was still dressed in the top and long skirt she'd worn to meet Laetitia, her face tear-stained, and her pillow damp.

Brett saw himself upon the couch. He'd nodded off, watching T.V. listlessly, and the light from the screen flickered across his face. They knew they'd been dreaming. Tash had seen herself running through the

party, searching for Brett and finding him kissing Colette while she struggled to run away through a hostile crowd. Brett saw the same crowd laughing at him while Tash belittled him.

But there was something different. They each dreamed they could see the city below them. The moon had come up. Full, silver and enormous. For a moment they felt that they could reach out a hand and touch it. Below them the streets and buildings took on a strange theatrical look in the light.

A breeze started up. It went drifting through the streets, slipping through the window of Tash's bedroom, making the curtains flutter in the shadows. It blew softly over Tash's face. The breeze picked up strength. It blew through the windows of Brett's apartment, turning the pages of a magazine on the table.

Glimpses of the past flitted through their dreams: a snatch of bitter words, a cold glance, the memory of a tender kiss. Rose petals rained down in regret, and the wind blew through the space between them. Moonlight fell on Tash's face, pale and swollen from crying. In the silver light her face began to shine. Then the moonlight fell on Brett's face, tired and strained, and it also began to glow. The light became a stream of glowing particles flowing down in moonbeams towards their faces. The atoms of their bodies sang

and swam in a furious cloud. Brett and Tash raised their heads then to look up into the moon but it was gone, risen high above them, out of their sight, and they knew they were back in their beds.

BRETT

The phone is ringing. From the answering machine I hear my own voice, smooth as ever, say: 'You've got Brett and I'm listening to you.' There is a beep, and the message begins.

'Brett, it's me, Rob. It's nine-thirty, I'm in the bar, the band's about to start. Where are you, man?'

I hear the din of the crowd coming down the line as he waits for my answer, but by the time I drag myself to the phone he has hung up. I feel exhausted, my arms and legs heavy, like a major hangover. How long have I been asleep? The apartment is in darkness. I look around and notice that the T.V. is on with the sound switched off. For some reason this seems important.

I stagger into the bathroom and splash cold water onto my face. That feels better. Groping for a towel, I find the light switch, and hit it.

I scream in fright, and jump about five feet off the ground. Tash's face is reflected in the mirror. I swing around, thinking she's sneaked into the room behind me, planning to re-enact the final scene from *Fatal*

Attraction. I knew I should have got my key back.

But there's no one there. I turn back to the mirror and it's still her face in the reflection. I reach out my hand to touch the mirror. The hands are wrong. They're her hands.

This is too weird.

I look down. It's my clothes but it's her body. I close my eyes, open them, close–open, close–open. Nothing. It's still her face.

'Oh, man,' I say, and then I scream again. It's her voice.

My mind shuts down now to a very dark place, and in that darkness, there is one thought. I run my hand — her hand — that hand — down my body. I feel breasts. I feel sick. I feel lower. That one thought is running through my mind.

Please let it still be there.

My hand hits the place between my legs, and I feel — space.

I let out a scream that echoes over all Elizabeth Bay.

TASH

The knocking on the door is very loud. A pounding. Laetitia is pounding on the door. She'd said she'd come over and bring pizzas and wine. I drag myself out of bed. The only light in the flat is a slash coming

under the front door, from the stairwell. The pounding continues. I'm still half-asleep. I'm coming, leave me alone. God, Laetitia, don't knock the door down. I open the door.

I didn't know there was a mirror right opposite my door. My reflection is standing in the doorway wearing Brett's white T-shirt and jeans. My reflection, in Brett's clothes, says, 'Oh shit.' And looks me up and down.

I look down. My top and skirt have come apart at the waist. A bare expanse of midriff is showing. Hairy. My top has ridden right up around my ribcage and is tight across my shoulders and chest.

I put my hands up to my face and then down to where my breasts used to be. They are not there. There is muscle there. I feel a sinking in my stomach. Something is very wrong.

Then I look at the figure in the doorway. The figure that looks like me. The top and jeans are over-large. A hand is ruffling the hair in a familiar gesture. 'Brett,' I say, in a very strange voice, 'is that you?'

He gives me a bloodcurdling look and says, 'Yes, it's me. It's me.'

Brett shoved Tash back into the apartment, looked over his shoulder furtively, and shut the door behind them. Though in Tash's body, he moved with the

aggressiveness of someone much larger. Someone like himself.

For a moment they stood speechless, staring at each other. Tash, in particular, looked very comical. Chest hair sprouted from her flimsy top; hairy legs stuck out under her skirt. She stared at Brett incredulously, studying her own face. Then she looked down at the body she was in, at Brett's arms and hands.

'Jesus,' she said. 'I'm you!'

They circled each other, slowly. 'It seems so obscene,' she whispered. 'You're *inside* me.'

Without warning Brett lunged across the room and grabbed her, staring desperately, despairingly, into her eyes (his eyes).

'God, god, what is this?' he said.

A strange look came over Tash, and she began to recite.

'The atomic weight of an element is the sum of its number of protons and neutrons.'

For a second he thought she had gone completely mad.

'What are you doing?' he demanded.

Her expression was keen with discovery. 'I look like you and I sound like you, but I still think like me. You try!'

He understood what she was saying. She had her

mind inside his body. So it should be his mind inside her body. His mind knew nothing of numbers of protons but it knew an awful lot about rock music.

'Pearl Jam,' he said aloud in Tash's voice, 'formed in Seattle in 1990 when Mother Love Bone broke up, and then re-formed as Temple of the Dog, then re-formed again — '

'Okay, okay,' interrupted Tash impatiently. 'We get the point.' She gazed at him. 'You're in my body. I'm in yours. But we've got our own minds. This is fascinating.'

It was then that he knew it was real. He became aware that ever since that first moment in the mirror, despite all his shock and fright, he had been hoping that Tash would apply her trained scientific mind to their conundrum and announce it wasn't happening. She would have some sensible-sounding explanation. Perhaps there had been a mind-distorting drug like LSD in the canapés at the party the previous night, and all over Sydney this evening there were unfortunate couples with severe visual distortions who thought they were their girlfriends — or ex-girlfriends — and vice versa. But Brett knew that tone. Even in his own voice, he could recognise that tone in which Tash said, 'This is fascinating.'

How many times in the last two years had he walked into a room and found Tash engrossed in a

scientific article from which she would announce, 'This is fascinating. Did you know that ... ?' Did he know what? Did he know there were three times as many species of parakeets in Gondawanaland than there are in Australia today? No, really, three times as many? Very nice. What do you want to do about dinner, babe?

He did not want to hear about fascination. He wanted her to fix it.

'It's not fascinating,' he hissed at her, 'it's *frightening*.'

He paced around the room, running his fingers through his hair and noting irritably as he did so, how much more hair Tash had, and how less satisfactory it was to run his fingers through it. It flopped in his eyes, it flopped everywhere. Didn't she know about Fudge? He flicked it away madly. How had this happened? How had this happened? He turned on Tash accusingly.

'I knew we were spending too much time together!'

Tash looked at him in shock, and then started to laugh hysterically.

'You didn't even want to share a flat together. Now you've really moved in!'

He grabbed her, was shaking her.

'What have you done to me?'

'What have I done to you? What have you done to me!'

'Undo it!' he demanded. He was still shaking her and she began to slap his arms. He realised then that she was now larger and stronger than he was but he also knew that she hadn't realised this. He lunged, and got her in a headlock before she could do them both damage with her unknown new-found strength.

The sound of the door buzzer shocked them both into silence. They stared at each other.

'It's Laetitia,' said Tash.

'Get rid of her.'

But Tash put out a restraining hand. 'No,' she began. His brow — her brow — furrowed up now, in the way Tash's did when she was thinking. But upon his face — upon hers now — the effect was overdone.

'This is our chance to see if this has really happened, or if we are having some sort of dual hallucination,' she said.

She looked at him and then pressed the door release. As she was doing so, he saw what an absurd figure she cut wearing her clothes on his body.

'Here,' he said urgently, pulling off his shirt. 'Put this on. I don't want anyone to see me like that.'

For a second she hesitated, then she hurriedly pulled off her top and they swapped. Tash was starting to do up the buttons, but still wearing the

skirt, when Laetitia knocked on the front door of the flat. She went to the door and opened it.

'Hi, Laetitia,' she said.

It was what she normally said. How she normally said it. But Laetitia, standing on the doorstep, carrying a pizza and a bottle of wine, regarded her as if she was — a cockroach. Yes, that was exactly how Laetitia's face went when she saw a cockroach scuttling around in the garbage, licking up the last drops of green curry sauce from a take-away food container.

She walked past Tash and into the lounge room.

Brett was standing there. She looked at him. Then she looked at Tash and Tash was suddenly aware that she was seeing Brett. Brett in a half-unbuttoned shirt with his hair ruffled and wearing Tash's long skirt. The same skirt she'd worn to the market with Laetitia that morning. Tash went to speak, but Laetitia held up a commanding hand.

'*Don't*,' said Laetitia. '*Don't.*'

She turned to Brett — Brett who looked like Tash.

'Do I hate him?' she enquired. 'Or do I like him now? When you've sorted it out, let me know.'

She dumped the pizzas on Brett, and then started towards the door but at the sight of Tash standing there she shuddered. She turned, and looked at both of them in their swapped clothes.

'I just wish you two could be me,' she said with distaste, 'so you could see how nauseating this looks.' Pleased with the dignity of her exit line, she spun on her heels and walked out, taking her bottle of wine with her.

'What is up with that woman?' Brett was opening the pizza box and munching on a slice. He turned to Tash for a response, but Tash was standing in the doorway, a look of horror on her face.

'What?' he demanded.

'What did I yell at you at the party?'

He raised his eyebrows wryly. 'Let me get the list.'

'I said, "I *wish* you could be me, so you could see what it's like. I *wish* I could be you, so you could see what a creep you've become" ... '

He looked at her as if she were an idiot. 'What are you saying? This is a wish? Am I wearing harem pants? Is this an episode of "I Dream Of Jeannie"?'

She paced rapidly across the room. 'It is medically, physically and chemically impossible for two bodies to dematerialise, travel through the air and switch brains. Science can't explain this.' Her expression became rapt. 'The forces of the universe are trying to teach you a lesson!'

Ain't that always the way, thought Brett, who'd taken the opportunity, while she was delivering this summing up, to have another bite of pizza and was

now prevented by mozzarella, crust and sun-dried tomato from replying. She thinks the entire forces of the universe are on her side. Other couples just argue over the C.D.'s. He gave her an unimpressed look.

'It's karma,' she snapped. 'You were with Colette. Haven't you ever heard of a mourning period?'

'I just ran into her, ' he moaned. 'There's *nothing* happening between me and Colette.'

'Sure!' scoffed Tash. 'This serves you right. You have no scruples.'

'Well, change me back,' he snapped, 'and I'll get out of your life.'

She looked at him in astonishment. 'What can I do about it?'

'It was your wish,' he said. 'You wish us back.'

She opened her mouth to retort, and then stopped. She closed her eyes, wrinkled up her face, and started concentrating. She remained that way for about thirty seconds, then opened her eyes. 'Nothing.'

'You're not trying!' he said petulantly.

'I am!' she exploded. 'You think I want to spend the rest of my life interviewing coked-out rock stars?'

Brett punched the door frame in frustration.

'This is not supposed to happen. I live in a modern world. I don't believe in wishes or astral travelling! I don't even believe in health food.'

Tash looked at him disdainfully. He was

completely going to pieces. He had no idea how to analyse a situation.

'Let's think logically,' she said, in a condescending tone. She paused for a moment to think. 'We slept, we transformed — perhaps if we sleep again we'll wake up tomorrow and everything will have changed back. Maybe it's just a one-day wish. You know, like "King For A Day".'

He stared at her in disbelief.

' "King For A Day"? Where do you get this stuff from?' he demanded. 'The Little Golden Book of Fairy Rules?'

'Do you have a better hypothesis?'

He shook his head. He was standing limply, exhausted by events. It was all too much for him. Maybe Tash's theory was right. It was the only hope on their horizon at the moment.

'God, I'm dead!' he said, flopping onto the sofa.

Tash regarded him coldly. The sight of Brett making himself so at home in her apartment displeased her. She had not forgotten the image of him and Colette at the markets.

'Why don't you go home, Brett,' she said. 'You can call me in the morning if anything happens.'

'No way,' he said determinedly.

'Why not?' She stood in front of him with her arms folded.

'You saw that movie — *The Fly*. If our bodies are going to be tele-transporting themselves during the night, I don't want to risk any interference. Cruising around between your place and mine, they could end up half teen surf junkie, half pizza delivery van.' He looked at her with grim resolution. 'I am *not* moving from here tonight.'

'You're not sleeping with me,' she said.

They looked at each other, and he could see there was no chance of it. He spread his arms and legs wide on the sofa, as if to claim possession of it. 'I'll sleep here,' he said.

'All right,' she replied reluctantly, and without another word went to her room.

Brett sat up. He started to take off his shoes to reveal a pair of slender white feet. He looked at these for a moment and then took off his jeans, revealing bare female legs. Then he noticed the neck of his T-shirt and stared down at the white curved shapes. Experimentally he took a deep breath and exhaled. The breasts moved outwards slightly. He pulled open the neck of the T-shirt and slipped his hand exploratively inside.

'What are you doing?' he heard his voice snap behind him. He swung around guiltily. Tash was standing there, holding a blanket, glaring at him.

He brazened his way through. 'Just trying to get

the hang of it all.'

Tash was indignant at the invasion of her person. 'Stop perving on my body!'

'I've seen it all before, Tash,' he reminded her smugly, 'just not exactly from this angle.'

This explanation, which seemed reasonable to him, did not impress her. She went into speech-mode immediately.

'Well not any more,' she announced firmly. 'We may be stuck together at the moment, but that doesn't change what's happened. From now on, we're strangers, and I want you to treat my body as such.'

In other words, he thought, 'I am just a poor innocent little bystander who's had her body hijacked by an unscrupulous, bimbo-loving C.D. salesman.' Does she think I'm enjoying this?

'Hey!' he said aloud. '*Fine* by me.'

She tossed him the blanket. 'Good,' she said, and walked off.

'Goodnight,' he called huffily after her.

He waited a few moments, and then looked over his shoulder. Her bedroom door was safely shut. He opened his T-shirt again and stared down at her breasts.

Oh man, he thought.

He shook his head and lay back on the hard sofa, trying to get comfortable. He wriggled. Something

was sticking into his back. He rooted around under the cushions and, after a short search, removed a fork and a shoe.

He tossed them on the floor in annoyance, and shut his eyes. Uncomfortable. Suffering.

In her room, Tash delayed getting undressed for quite some time. An hour later, when everything was very quiet, she took off her shirt and then pulled open her underpants and looked down.

Jesus, she thought. It looks like something out of *Alien*.

She looked at herself in the mirror and held up her teddy bear print nightie against her masculine chest. It looked, needless to say, ridiculous.

I always liked chest hair, she thought, but I never thought I'd end up wearing it.

She sighed, and turned out the light.

The first thing Brett was aware of next morning was a stiff neck. Still half-asleep, he put up a hand to rub it and came across soft, fine hair. Then he remembered. Although he knew the truth already, he held up his hands to check them. They were still her hands.

He sat up on the couch. Seated opposite at the dining table was Tash, freshly showered, her hair (his hair) wrapped in a towel turban. The very sight made

his heart sink. She was poring over piles of scientific journals and reference books.

'So much for theory number one,' he said sourly. 'What do we do now?'

'I haven't been able to find anything which could explain it,' she replied without looking up from her books. 'I do know of another science writer, though, who's done work on psycho-physical forces. Maybe he can put us on to someone — '

'We're not telling anyone!' Brett erupted, springing up from the couch. 'Not *anyone*. But especially not the press. If this gets out, it'll ruin me.' And quite apart from destroying his career, it would make him a national joke. He could see the trash mag headline two weeks down the track. I HAD MY GIRLFRIEND'S BABY! says fallen rock talk star, Brett Flinders.

'Well, what do you propose?' said Tash irritably, looking up at him for the first time. All he seemed capable of was panicking uselessly and pouring cold water on all her ideas.

Brett paced up and down, searching for inspiration. What they had to do now was to make things appear totally normal. There could already be talk after that scene with Tash at the party.

'First,' he instructed Tash, 'you need to get some clean clothes from my place to wear. Brett Flinders

cannot be seen in an unironed shirt.'

She looked up at him, unimpressed. 'Do you really think that's a priority?'

'Have you seen those tabloid photos — "Celebrity, Tired And Emotional"? This is *exactly* how they happen.' He continued pacing, consumed by his plan. 'You'd better get my stovepipe pants, my tan leather jacket — I'll give you a list ... '

Tash rolled her eyes. Five minutes later she was walking out of the building on her way to Brett's.

In the morning sunshine, Rob sat on the balcony of his apartment, sipping coffee, and looking down on the cul-de-sac that was shared by his, Tash's, and Laetitia's apartment buildings. They had one by one moved into the street, in order to be near one another, and it was a cosy little neighbourly cluster. Brett (who lived about five streets away, and thus was an outsider) liked to refer to it jokingly as 'Melrose Place', but Laetitia pointed out caustically that if this were so, they'd all be bonking each other's brains out, whereas, with the exception of Tash, their little cul-de-sac appeared to be an entirely sex-free zone.

Nonetheless, the metaphor appealed to Laetitia, and on rainy days she passed the time deciding who was who from the series. Brett, of course, was the scheming Michael, and Tash was a combination of

Jane before she turned and Alison without the drinking problem. Laetitia personally aspired to Amanda's queen-bitchiness, though unfortunately she felt she had more in common with Jo, in her unerring ability to pass out drunk in the apartment of exactly the wrong man. And Rob was definitely Matt.

'But Rob's not gay!' protested Tash. 'No,' Laetitia conceded. 'But both of them are the kind of guy who'd help you paint your bathroom, and neither of them appear to have had sex since 1991.' And that was that.

On this particular morning, the hapless Rob noticed someone coming out of Tash's building. To his surprise, it appeared to be Brett.

Given the hour, and Brett's dishevelled look, and his non-appearance at the bar last night, Rob made the obvious assumption. He was truly astonished. He had really thought, from the way Brett had been speaking yesterday, that this time it was definitely over.

In the building opposite, Laetitia, dressed in her silk pyjamas and sipping coffee at her window, had seen the same sight, and come to the same conclusion. It was as she had feared. Tash was backsliding, and Brett had sweet-talked her into letting him stay the night. Laetitia was furious. She gave Brett's departing figure a malevolent look that was truly worthy of Queen Amanda.

Tash, oblivious of the analysis going on above her, walked in her own brisk way over to Brett's apartment. Once inside, she clomped her way across the granite floors, and went straight for Brett's cordless phone. Brett had been adamant about the need for secrecy, but Tash felt so overwhelmed by the situation that she needed to confide in someone. She dialled a number. Laetitia, please be home, she thought, as she walked up the stairs.

Holding the phone to her ear with one hand, she flicked through Brett's rack of clothes while she waited for an answer on the other end. There were rows and rows of expensive looking shirts, jackets, and trousers, immaculately pressed, some still in drycleaning bags, and all arranged in colour order.

Here's the answer to the third world jacket crisis, she thought to herself wryly. You could dress half of India with the amount of stuff he's got here.

The image of the inhabitants of New Delhi decked out in Brett's leather jackets and stovepipe pants made her smile, but just then Laetitia's voice answered the phone.

'Hello?'

Tash took a deep breath.

'Laetitia, I know you will think this is strange,' she said, 'but — I really need to see you. I've got to tell you something. Can I come over to your place?'

There was a pause at the other end of the line.

'Is that you, Brett?' Laetitia asked slowly.

'No — well — yes,' Tash stumbled, 'but — '

'Brett, I don't even want to talk to you on the phone. I certainly don't want to see you alone, and I definitely don't want you in my house.'

The disconnected signal clicked on in Tash's ear. Oh Laetitia, she thought.

Laetitia wasted no time in thinking. She wanted to know what was going on, and she wanted to know now. Still pyjama-clad, she rocketed out of her building and shot across the street to Tash's building. A man was letting himself in the front security door. For a moment he glanced doubtfully at Laetitia's pyjamas, but the look on her face was so ferocious that he immediately stepped aside and let her pass. She marched up to Tash's apartment and pounded on the door.

Brett was dragged out of an unsatisfying doze by the knocking. He'd passed a fitful night on the couch, and was feeling seedy and exhausted. His mood was not improved by the sight of Laetitia, panting and breathless, as he opened the door.

Great, he thought. Madam Lash. Just what I need.

Laetitia looked at him with concern, noting puffy eyes, pale skin, tousled hair. If that's love, she thought,

count me out. This made her firmer in her resolve. She swept in and sat down on the couch without invitation, leaving Brett with no option but to sit down facing her.

'Tash, what's going on? Did Brett stay here last night? Are you back together again?'

'You could say we've decided to stick together for a while,' Brett said dryly.

Damn, thought Laetitia. He's weaseled his way back again. Why couldn't he go off and find himself a nice bimbo, and then they could drive around in a sports car together and worry about their hair.

'God why, Tash?' she demanded. 'He's such a louse. He's not worth it.'

Oh, thank you very much, thought Brett.

He looked so surprised and affronted by her frankness that for a moment Laetitia wondered if she'd gone too far.

'Oh, I don't know,' he said, recovering himself. 'I think you've misjudged Brett, Laetitia. He's a cool guy. He's funny. He's stylish. He's very charming.'

What are you doing, Tash? thought Laetitia, gazing at her friend in bemusement. Writing his press releases?

'He *thinks* he's charming,' she replied with a shudder. 'Those big cheesy smiles — he always looks like he's doing an ad for a discount teeth warehouse.'

You bag! thought Brett. Admit it, you secretly lust for me.

He suddenly saw an opportunity for revenge.

'Between friends, though,' he said, leaning forward confidentially, 'you can't say you've never found Brett attractive.'

There really was something very odd about Tash today, thought Laetitia. And look at the way she was sitting, leaning forward, legs parted, hands resting on knees — like a bloke, almost. Odd. Laetitia reached over and patted Brett's hand.

'Tash — I can say it.'

At this, Brett looked suddenly crestfallen.

It was maybe a little bit of a fib, but Laetitia had her loyalties. 'I don't know how to tell you this,' she said. 'But he just called me up and said he wanted to come over to my place.'

Brett jumped up from the couch in fury. 'I told her not to tell anyone!' Then he looked down, and realised that Laetitia was staring at him in concern and confusion. 'Ah — maybe he was just trying to be friendly.'

'I doubt it,' said Laetitia, thinking that Tash was most definitely not herself today and (quite correctly) blaming Brett for this. Still, there was one ray of hope.

'What's happening about his big break?' she asked. 'Is he going to New York after all?'

Brett just stopped himself from groaning aloud. Oh, god — my job! he thought. In all the rush of events he'd forgotten about New York.

'I — I don't know,' he stammered.

'We can only hope,' said Laetitia, her tone making it clear what she was hoping for.

At that moment the front door opened and Tash came in. Her face lit up at the sight of her friend but Laetitia gave her an icy look, muttered 'Bye' to Brett, and walked past her to the door, leaving Tash staring after her, upset.

She was not alone in this. Brett was storming up and down the room, giving anything in his way — and there was always something in his way, one of her shoes, a book, a cushion — a furious kick.

'I get the biggest break of my life,' he announced as she turned to him, 'and I'm wearing my ex-girlfriend's head. You're not going to lose me that job.'

Tash looked at him calmly, unimpressed. Oh, yes, the old jilted-woman-swaps-brains routine, she thought. You're right! That's the reason I did it. To stop you going to New York! Of course I could have just gone to a tabloid gossip columnist and said you were no good in bed. That would have been simpler. But no, I'm so intense and over the top, I decide to swap our brains instead.

Brett continued to pace madly up and down the room. Who could they turn to? Doctors? Psychologists? No one would believe them.

'We can't tell anyone about this,' he said. 'They'll think we're psychos. And what about work tomorrow? We'll have to ring in sick.'

Now Tash was alarmed. 'I can't do that,' she said forcefully, shaking her head. 'Mondays are the days I submit my story ideas for the week.' She could imagine the delight of Harrison, her Chief-of-Staff, if she was not at work tomorrow. He had never wanted to have a science writer at the paper, and he had a particular dislike of her that went beyond this. If she wasn't there tomorrow, he'd use her absence as an excuse to lock out all her stories for the whole of the coming week. Then he'd spend his time implying she wasn't earning her money and was an egghead luxury that the paper neither needed nor could afford.

'You'll have to go for me,' she said, her expression of concentration intense as she formulated a plan. 'I can write my article at home in the evenings and you can submit it on Thursday. As long as there's no press conferences, you should cope.' She looked at him. 'It's not easy, my job, you know.'

'Neither is mine,' he retorted huffily.

'You!' she scoffed. 'All you do is sit back in a lounge chair drinking vodka on national television

and gossiping with people. I can do that.'

'I think there's a *bit* more to it.'

She shrugged. 'You can brief me,' she said condescendingly. 'We'll manage.'

Brett looked at her, despairingly. What choice did he have? However, the simple fact of having some kind of plan calmed him a little. He ran a critical eye over her.

'Get up,' he instructed, 'walk around.'

Tash stood, but she took only a few hesitant steps before Brett began to groan.

'No! You don't even *walk* like me. You're too stiff,' he coached her, 'relax. Look like the world's yours. *Cruise* with it.'

Tash turned to him and raised her eyebrows. 'Lead from the hip, you mean,' she said sarcastically. 'You walk as if there's someone playing cymbals in your pants.' She swaggered across the room with her groin (his groin) pushed forward, clicking her fingers to a cool jazz beat, and doing a fairly good impression of Brett in full T.V. personality mode.

'You mean a high-hat, not cymbals,' said Brett, unamused, 'and anyway, it's better than a brass marching band like you.' He sprang up and stomped around her in circles, a quick precise march, head down, face determined, like a wind-up toy gone mad.

'I'm not that bad!' she exclaimed.

'You are,' he said. 'You're like a tiny tank, Tash.' He was grinning at her. 'You wouldn't want to get in the way of you, it's *frightening*.'

A sudden memory of her Chief-of-Staff's fearful face, as she chased him across the office, came into Tash's mind. She had to repress a smile.

'Very funny,' she said.

Brett came close, and looked into her eyes, searchingly. 'Will they really believe you're me?' he sighed.

She observed in reasonable tones that they were unlikely to think she was anyone else.

'They'll never guess,' she added, 'why should they? I know everything about you.'

Brett felt that somehow this was not a compliment, as if she was implying his life was a very slim volume.

'And I know everything about you,' he replied, competitive to the last.

'See what I mean?'

Brett had the unsettling feeling that he'd just been outmanoeuvred.

Tash had now dropped heavily onto the couch and was stretching herself out with a yawn. This reminded Brett of something important. He slunk across the floor and sat down next to her. He reached out smoothly, picked up the nearest foot, removed the

shoe and started to massage her — his, he reminded himself — foot.

In her new body, Tash still liked having her feet rubbed. Almost without thinking about it, she arched her feet in pleasure as Brett completed one foot and started working on the other, and settled more comfortably into the pillows, closing her eyes. Suddenly she opened them again.

'What are you doing?' she said suspiciously.

He was busted. He gave up all pretence. 'I'm not sleeping on that couch again,' he pouted. 'It almost killed my back last night. I mean, your back.'

She looked at him guardedly, but it was a very good argument and he knew it. She would want her back returned in working order.

It did not in the end, though, achieve what he wanted. In bed Tash lay reading a book with her usual concentration. Brett lay beside her, looking at her expectantly.

If she puts the book down, he thought, it means she wants to.

Tash looked at him out of the corner of her eye. This book is excruciatingly boring, she thought, but if I put it down he'll think I want to.

Brett cleared his throat, and stretched his arms, but she continued to ignore him. Deflated, he gave up,

rolled over and tried to sleep.

He was conscious of her lying there still beside him, as if about to say something or reach out and touch him. But she did not move. Her light clicked off. He felt her settling down to sleep and deliberately leaving a wide space between them, but he also heard a sound, like a sigh.

Five

IN YOUR SKIN

TASH

It's the ordinary things that turn out to be the most difficult. Like shaving. On the first morning, what I'm nervous about is not doing Brett's show, but about going to the men's toilets at the television station.

As I go into my own bathroom to wash, I imagine myself trying to do my relaxed Brett walk into the men's loo, as if I went there every day. But what to do inside? Do all men stand up? Or is the cubicle an option?

But I don't worry above shaving. I started shaving my legs exactly four months before my mother discovered me doing it, assumed it was the first time, and instructed me to never do it again as it made the hairs grow thicker. Naturally I continued. So now I confidently pick up Brett's razor, draw it down his cheek and immediately nick myself.

I merely wince at the sting, but Brett reacts as if I've slit his throat. Meanwhile, in the crowded bathroom, he's leaning over the bathtub brushing *my*

teeth as if they were a wall being scrubbed in preparation for painting.

'Don't brush my teeth so hard, thank you,' I say. 'My gums are very sensitive.'

'That's because you don't floss them,' he retorts with a satisfied look, his mouth covered in toothpaste. 'While you're in my body, I'd appreciate it if you flossed mine. You can at least leave my mouth as you found it.'

I roll my eyes, but he hasn't finished his lecture. He turns to me as if he's about to give me the secret of the universe.

'The two rules of T.V.: never wear glasses, and look after your teeth. Teeth and eyes. People go crazy for them. I mean, what's Tom Cruise? He's just some short chunky guy. But he's got teeth and eyes.' He looks at me solemnly. 'So look after them. It's my job.'

'I can see the headlines now,' I say. ' "TV COMPERE SHOCK — RECEDING GUMS".'

I return to removing *his* stubble from (as I consider it) *my* face. While I'm getting used to walking around as him, and to discovering his big hands at the end of my arms — *his* arms — it's still a surprise to look in the mirror and discover his face where mine should be — should be, of course, if our bodies had not been switched.

I suppose, as I stand there looking at his face, that this is the reason why I am finding shaving difficult. This face is definitely different from my face. There is such a lot of it. I've often stroked Brett's cheek, running my fingertips from his cheekbone down to his jaw between kisses. It was now striking me that this was quite a long trip. All that way from his jawbone to his eye. I put my hand up to feel his bare cheek and Brett snaps something at me from behind.

'What?' I ask him, looking at my body as I do so. I've never noticed — for obvious reasons — that I have some pale freckles on one shoulder-blade.

'I said lather. You've only lathered one cheek. Lather with the foam all over before you shave.'

'Oh, yes,' I say, raising my — his — hand again to the bare cheek and noting as I touch it, the thickness of the stubble. My mother was right. Inexpertly I draw the razor down the lathered cheek and nick it again.

Brett groaned. I wonder if waxing is an option. Why don't men wax when they complain so much about shaving? But it doesn't seem an appropriate time to ask. Brett is watching me very tensely. I wonder if I could go to a barber and have a shave done professionally? And then I see a vision of myself with my head tilted back, my throat exposed, and a barber standing over me with one of those long, old-

fashioned razors. I close my eyes in horror.

And then there is getting dressed. Here, I think, I have the best of the deal. I know how to tie a tie — not that Brett wears them often but if I have to, I'm prepared — and I'm used to wearing trousers, jeans, shirts, jackets, in fact anything I'm likely to come across in his wardrobe.

Brett, by contrast, uses everything but his teeth in the process of doing up my bra strap, giving what's inside a good shake to settle it in place. Then he sticks one foot half-way down the limp leg of a pair of pantyhose and sits gazing at it for a moment, while the end dangles from his foot like a tail, as if expecting it to come to life and rise up his leg — my leg — of its own accord. Finally he gathers up the leg into a ball and begins to smooth it on with his hands. 'It's not a condom!' I exclaim. He gives me a hostile look and starts work on the other leg.

While he struggles, I calmly get dressed: boxer shorts, shirt, stovepipe trousers, socks, shoes. Everything is new and perfectly pressed. However when I look in the mirror it's immediately apparent that something is wrong. I am sure that when Brett wears these pants, the front around the fly does not sit so — oddly. There seems to be a sort of — 'bunchiness' is the only word I can come up with to describe the effect.

And which side is 'It' meant to go on? Neither feels right, and right up the middle's not comfortable. Brett is now in the bathroom applying my make-up with considerable competence — this is one process he is familiar with although, as he says, he is more used to having someone do it for him. Pride forbids me from asking for his aid. I unzip the fly, try to make some rearrangements, and do the zip up again. There seemed to be no real improvement. I try again. Finally, I look up and see Brett watching me anxiously, as if I'm going to damage his manhood. His hovering annoys me. I pull up the zip quickly, and catch myself in it; Brett's face goes pale, and both of us hop around the room in a silent dance of pain.

There is also the matter of pockets. I have never been aware before that pockets are such a significant part of men's lives. I have been used to regarding pockets as decoration. On women's clothes (as Brett soon discovers) they are quite often false and even when they are big enough to be useful, it ruins the line of an outfit to actually put anything *in* a pocket. However, Brett actually has a whole system for his pockets: wallet on inside right pocket of jacket, comb in right back pocket of pants, change in small front pocket on right ... He stops me from putting all these items in his briefcase and I realise that all the things which I normally carry in my handbag, he deploys all

over his person. It would look strange if I am continually ferreting about myself looking for ordinary things so as I walk into the television station, I am reminding myself: 'Wallet — jacket, right inside; comb — pants, right rear; car keys — pants, left side; change — pants, front right; handkerchief — pants, right side; pen — jacket, right inside with wallet.'

'Hi, Brett.' The voice is breathy and manages to get a lot of feeling into those two syllables. Half-way through my rundown of locations I turn around, startled, and see the receptionist in the foyer smiling brilliantly towards me. I nod. Last night I gave Brett a sort of map of my office with people's names so he wouldn't make any mistakes in identification. But he of course didn't prepare one for *me*, saying that I already knew Rob and Davis, his producer, and they were the only important ones.

He seems to have little faith in me. 'Now you say *nothing*,' he tells me. 'Just keep quiet and agree with everyone. If anyone asks, just say you've got the flu.'

'Hi, Brett,' says another woman flirtatiously, as I pass her on the stairs. She seems taken aback by my fairly cool reaction. I barely have time to recover when two female voices say in unison, 'Hi, gorgeous.' All the way down the corridors to Brett's office, there seemed to be bright-eyed women batting their eyelids at me. What is this, I think, an office or a harem?

By the time I enter his office, I am fuming. There is one last bright good morning to contend with. Brett's P.A. is waiting for me, smiling one of those big harem specials. 'Hi, spunky,' she says. I glare back at her. The P.A. looks startled.

'Your Sheik,' I tell her silently, 'has got the flu, OK? Spread it round the rest of the harem.'

The main event of the day, as Brett had warned her, was the show's weekly production meeting. Tash, accustomed to attending meetings, went in with her notepad and pen and began studiously taking notes which startled Davis, her producer, who'd never seen Brett write before. Davis decided that the prospect of the New York job must really be starting to have an impact. Brett would be talking about hiring a manager soon.

' ... and for the video of the week, I don't know, what do you think about Pearl Jam, Brett?'

Davis glanced over at Brett to get his nod and grin. Of course the Pearl Jam video was already slotted in but it was important to ask for people's opinions. Davis ran a tight, professional show and part of running a tight, professional show was ensuring that the talent felt it had been consulted. Hot young up-and-coming stars like Brett Flinders did not get out of line while Davis was the producer. They got

consulted and they agreed.

Tash was thrown. Pearl Jam? She summoned up a mental image — they were talking about a video after all — of how pearls might look in jam. Maybe it was some sort of technical term in television which she hadn't come across before. She must make sure that Brett briefed her properly. All he'd told her was to keep quiet and agree with everyone. But it didn't even occur to Tash to agree with people when she didn't know what they were talking about.

'Ah — remind me, what is Pearl Jam?'

There was a sudden silence. Tash glanced around, bemused. No one around the table met her eyes.

Davis was aware that he couldn't let this silence continue. It was looking like Brett had pulled a fast one on him and it was true, he had. Davis gave his talk show host a quick glance. Not looking his best this morning. A bit — you couldn't say crumpled. Not that bad. But not quite coordinated. The hair wasn't sitting up properly. Seemed somehow to flop forward almost. Wrong shampoo probably. *Two* shaving nicks. A bit sort of hunched up. Yes, definitely lacking that usual edge. Probably spent the whole weekend boning up on every muso who'd played any venue larger than his mum's kitchen in preparation for trying to impress the pants off the people in New York. Davis did not like being set up by his own discovery at his own

production meeting but you had to admit it, Brett Flinders was a *star* in bigger letters than the Hollywood sign and he knew his stuff. Davis philosophically told himself to go with the flow. He laughed.

'Exactly. What is Pearl Jam? You're right, they've had it. We'll run the Lemonheads.' Everyone around the table also laughed while Tash smiled, still confused. Davis was going on, 'To boost the ratings, we've got to get new publicity. I've arranged for you to spend the day with *TV Week* tomorrow, Brett. Cover story.'

'Great!' thought Tash wryly.

'Great!' she said aloud enthusiastically.

Davis, an expert on pitches of enthusiasm, thought that this response was insincere and reflected on how quickly these new kids got up themselves. Before he heard about the New York job, Brett Flinders would have killed to be the *TV Week* cover story.

As the meeting was breaking up, the phone rang. The P.A. answered it and handed it to Tash almost reverentially. Tash tried to hide her surprise at the P.A.'s manner. She had found that her morning at the television station reminded her of the one time she had (because of a bungle by the airline) been given a first class seat on an international flight. Then, too, staff

always been at hand offering her things and seeming to anticipate her every wish. A cappuccino had already been supplied along with a glass of mineral water. She had the feeling that somebody was going to come by soon with a little moisture wipe and a cushion for her neck.

It was Brett.

'What's up with the secretaries in this place?' he asked. He had told the older woman — the one in the suit, MacMahon or something her name was — that he wanted a coffee and she had told him to drop dead.

'I have no idea what you're talking about,' Tash said, secretly pleased.

'How's it going?' he hissed.

Aware of the others listening as they were gathering their things to leave, Tash said, 'All right, we'll discuss it tonight. You?'

'OK. Listen ... ' Brett had remembered that his photographer friend, Steve, had an opening of his new exhibition that evening and that he had promised to go.

'Do I have to?' asked Tash.

Exasperated, he spelt it out for her, 'Yeah — you have to go because *I* have to go and *you're me*.'

'Oh, all right.' She wasn't even attempting to be gracious. Brett could feel her dying to ask about what happened to her story but that would have to wait.

There were obviously people within earshot at her end. Whereas around him, no one appeared to take much notice of anyone. People worked on their computers, had long telephone calls during which they took detailed notes, and disappeared periodically off to meetings or to conduct interviews. He was finding it distinctly dull, unfriendly, and unglamorous after life at the station.

As for Harrison, the Chief-of-Staff — frankly Brett couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Harrison had happened to pass his desk and Brett, recognising him from Tash's description, gave him a wave.

'Nice tie, pal,' he quipped.

Harrison had stopped, taken aback.

'The day just didn't seem the same without your morning ambush,' he commented sarcastically. 'What have you got?'

Brett reached down casually and rummaged in Tash's handbag for a piece of paper. Tash had written down the topic for him. After a few moments, he found it, and pulled it out triumphantly.

'I've got a story on — ah — electro-magnetics!' he read.

'Great,' said Harrison, 'I'll save the front page for that.'

It was obvious the guy was an arsehole and that

he acted as if he, personally, had invented sarcasm but Brett could understand his point of view. Electromagnetics was not going to leave the city's newspaper readership panting, 'More, more ... '. Not like 'express'.

'What am I supposed to do for the rest of the day?' he whispered down the phone to Tash. 'Count staples?'

Although everyone had left the room, Tash still lowered her voice. 'I always go through new science journals on Monday. They'll be in the basket on the desk. Bring them home for me, will you?'

'OK, see you at six.'

As he was putting the phone down, Brett saw Harrison looking at him from across the room. He picked up one of the science magazines and began to leaf through it reluctantly.

'Inside the atom, particles are in complete mayhem,' he read. 'All around us, objects that appear to be solid are not. The very appearance of things is a deception.'

You're telling me, pal, he thought.

The sight of the art gallery packed with an interesting crowd made Brett feel pretty good until he remembered that he was the one in the dress who had to stand by while Steve directed his remarks at Tash.

Tash knew nothing about Steve's work, and instead of smiling and moving on with 'Looks great — catch you later,' she tried to say something intelligent, and Brett had to stand by her side for a very long three minutes until, to his relief, they were interrupted.

'So how did it go?' he asked her anxiously.

'You didn't tell me your ratings were down,' she said, weaving through the crowd.

'It's just a few dud guests.' Now he was worried. 'What did they say?'

'They want you to do an interview all day tomorrow with some magazine — *TV World*, *TV Times* —'

'*TV Week*!' he exclaimed, thrilled.

'Maybe I can call in sick,' she was saying.

'No way.' As far as he was concerned she would do that interview at gunpoint if necessary.

'And how am I going to get my own job done?' she inquired sarcastically.

'It's under control,' he said.

At the gallery, however, he decided that it was the only thing in their newly rearranged lives that was. Tash insisted upon eating an exotic hors d'oeuvres which was covered in oil and red spices even though she was wearing his best new Gaultier shirt. While doing this, she cheerfully told him about how she'd asked the entire production meeting to tell her what

was Pearl Jam. Oh no. Would he still have a career to go back to if he ever returned to his own body?

The worst thing, though, was sex. It was a very sexy atmosphere. Steve's photos were black and white prints of men and women's bodies: breasts, butts, thighs, shoulders. Men and women, alone and together. Inevitably his eyes moved from the walls to the people in the crowd about him. Women in low-cut dresses and — this was disturbing — men in tight T-shirts with strong arms and well-defined butts, but he tried not to think about that. That must be some bit of hormonal cross-wiring Tash had left behind in her body.

Everywhere he looked there were attractive men and women together. He kept remembering that he and Tash were now officially broken up. He ought to be here at this party enjoying himself. He was a red-blooded man in the prime of his life, Brett thought, looking around him in frustration. Well, he had the *mind* of a red-blooded man in the prime of his life. What he didn't have became suddenly obvious when Tash caught his arm in a fierce grip and said urgently, 'Stand in front of me.' She dragged him across to cover her groin. His groin. 'God, it moves by itself!'

'Yep,' he said with some satisfaction, thinking that there was one woman in the world who now really knew what it was like to be a man.

'My thoughts are my own,' Tash said indignantly, still pressed up against him, 'but I think the hormones are still yours. You really are over-sexed, you know.'

With visions of those strong male arms and shapely butts all around them, he was about to point out to her that her libido was not exactly unmoved either when Rob came up to them.

'Does this mean you two have sorted things out?' he asked, noting them standing close together. Brett was silent for a moment thinking just how unsorted things really were, and before he could say anything Tash jumped in.

'Yes. It was all my fault,' she said smoothly. 'I was a complete creep. I apologised to Tash and admitted that I was entirely in the wrong.'

Rob looked embarrassed. 'Good for you, mate,' he said doubtfully at this unlikely confession from a guy like Brett, then moved off. Brett opened his mouth to have a go at Tash, but she was looking around delightedly.

'No one even guesses,' she said in amazement.

It suddenly occurred to him that the situation had possibilities. He'd noticed earlier that a guy had been looking at *his* breasts.

'This could be fun,' he said wickedly. He and Tash smiled at each other.

Brett swam through the crowd like a shark

looking for dinner. He had seen Raquel, a voluptuous young blonde whom he knew; while there was nothing he could do about her just now, he could always make some positive investments for the future, and maybe even cause a bit of trouble for Tash meanwhile. He knew that Raquel liked him, it was time to let her know how much he appreciated her. As he was passing he gave her a warm smile and in a minute was engaged in a friendly conversation with her about their favourite topic — himself — although she was, of course, sending her admiring glances across the room towards Tash all the time that they talked.

'Oh, Brett's very sensitive,' he said, 'and he *loves* intelligent women. Oh, he's always said that about you, by the way — that he admires your intelligence.'

Raquel looked impressed and gazed across at Tash with a glow in her eyes, leaving Brett free to stare uninterrupted at her cleavage.

For her part, Tash noticed that a man standing in the crowd next to her was doing a bit of gazing of his own, looking appraisingly at Brett in her body.

'Do you, ah, find Tash attractive?' she ventured, nodding in that direction and trying to sound nonchalant.

'Yeah, not bad at all.'

Tash screwed up her courage, and leant close to his ear.

'She's *wild* in bed,' she said knowingly.

The man looked at her, flabbergasted.

Brett returned to Tash's side feeling very pleased with himself. She looked pretty happy, too. Then he noticed a dark look stealing over Tash's face. He followed her gaze and saw Colette across the room. She was coming towards them.

'Don't look now, but I think she's coming to talk to you,' he said.

Colette sidled up nervously.

'Good to see you two have made up,' she said.

Revenge, thought Brett, is sweet. He smiled warmly at Colette and said to her, 'Colette, I want to apologise about the other night. I was being totally neurotic. I guess sometimes I'm just a silly woman.'

He turned to Tash, grinning, to savour his victory. But he was premature. Tash looked him calmly in the eyes, and then very deliberately poured her glass of wine over herself. Over *his* Gaultier shirt.

'Oh, how did I do that?' she asked in air-head fashion. Brett stormed off. Tash exulted. And Colette had the feeling that, somehow, she'd missed something.

That night Brett and Tash slept as far apart as possible in bed with a great wall of pillows between them.

BRETT

Today I discovered there is a downside to breasts.

Now, I gotta say upfront that I'm a man who's looked at breasts from all angles (especially from upfront), and until today I never imagined there could be such a thing as a downside to breasts, unless it could be that there's just not enough of them around and on show. They're magical, mesmerising, and magnificent. No two pairs are alike, so no matter how many you've seen, you crave to get a good peep at any new pair that bounce into your orbit. They are proof there is a god (and he's a guy). They're an art form and a sport rolled into one (two).

But this is what I've discovered.

You can't run with them.

Tash has what I've always considered to be C-class breasts. This is not an insult; on a scale that goes all the way to F it's in fact quite a compliment.

A: Awesome. We're talking Anita Ekberg in a wet dress in the Trevi fountain here; Marilyn, Jayne, Pamela; anyone who's ever been in a Russ Meyers film; and a select range of D-cup demi-goddesses. Amazing, astounding, above average.

B: Big, bouncy, and beautiful. They move, they swing; cleavage city. Your averagely gorgeous, busty woman.

C: Character breasts. Cute. Not really big, but

charming in their own way, and this can take a million forms. They can be perky, poky, pale pink, smooth, freckled, friendly, ferocious, firm, flowing ...

D: Delicate. Kinda small, but still intriguing. Kazan said they're the most intriguing of all, because you're dying to get a good look to see just exactly how much there is there, and I can see where he's coming from.

E: Extremely small. For the specialist; an acquired taste.

F: Flat. Forget it.

Tash, as I said, I've always considered in the C-class — on the small side, but perfectly formed, with a cute but kind of assertive air that always gets me going for reasons I don't completely understand. But modest. We're not talking a structural load here.

So I've never understood why she bothered to wear a bra. And as it's such a drag of a time trying to get them done up every morning (hey, my twenty-seven years of commando training has been focused on undoing them *forehand*, on someone else, not backhand on myself, okay?), I thought, why bother? Why not give the bra a miss and let nature run free?

Big mistake.

So I walk out of the flat this morning *au naturel*, nothing between me and the silk of the dress I'm wearing. And I can feel the silk rubbing against me

right where they're most sensitive, and I'm kinda getting turned on and I'm not even starting to think how twisted that is, I'm just going with it and enjoying it. A cab pulls up at the end of the street to drop some all-night reveller home in time for breakfast. I call out but he doesn't hear me, so, knowing how many desperadoes late for work and capable of killing for a cab live in this neighbourhood, I run for it.

Bigger mistake.

I'm bounding forward when I suddenly and painfully become aware that there's an awful lot of bounding going on, but not all in the same direction. I've got one breast going left; the other right; when I go up they go down; and when I go down they're threatening to hit me in the face. I slow to a jog, but nothing faster than a walk will stop the movement. I see a guy across the street turn and spot the cab, so I throw my bag over my shoulder, cross my arms across my chest, and up the pace to a kind of trot. But Tony Testosterone's in full sprint, and by the time I get there, there's nothing left for me but a faceful of exhaust fumes. And I stand there, my arms crossing my heart where the black nylon should be, overcome by a single thought.

I'm not thinking about myself, which I have to admit is pretty rare.

I'm thinking, how does Pamela run?

I'm flashing back to every slo-mo sprint scene in 'Baywatch' that I can remember (how can you forget), and I'm thinking — the woman deserves a medal.

I mean, that's got to be a new class of Olympic weightlifting. There's no structural undergarment hidden in that little red swimsuit. There's no restrainer or retainer; there's no support except the cheering camera crew. How does she do it?

Struck by this new insight into female heroism, I walk carefully back to the apartment. I put on a bra. And I dial for a cab.

As Tash soon discovered, a cover story about a T.V. star was considered far too serious a matter for it to be left in the hands of the T.V. star. She sat around while the *TV Week* journalist interviewed, it appeared, everyone else but her. Davis, Rob, the station's own publicity unit all told the *TV Week* reporter how bright and cooperative and friendly Brett Flinders was, how he was a funny guy with lots of ideas, how he was set to go a long way, etc. The only actual contribution she had to make to this process was to get photographed.

This turned out to be very tedious. First a whole series of relaxed interesting photographs were taken of her doing relaxed interesting things in Brett's office.

Then this didn't seem satisfactory — there was a lot of murmuring between the *TV Week* journalist and the *TV Week* photographer and it was announced that they would go out to the park to take some relaxed interesting shots in an outdoor location.

Tash accompanied them carrying Brett's briefcase which contained her scientific journals. There was a lot of Tash standing around under trees trying to look relaxed and interesting and being very bored.

Finally the journalist proposed a break. She would go off and buy them all coffee while the photographer changed his lenses. Tash sat down under a tree and took out her scientific journals and Brett's glasses. He wore glasses for reading but never appeared in public in them. Without thinking about this, though, she put them on and settled down happily with the latest issue of *New Scientist* until the *TV Week* people were ready. In the end, however, this did not happen. The journalist came over with her coffee, said that they'd be starting again soon and then returned fifteen minutes later to say that they'd decided to go with what they'd got.

'You're happy then?' she said, glad to be saved from more boredom while they placed her in this position and that.

'Yes,' they said, looking at her a bit strangely but happy enough. She was able to leave the station early

'Yes. No pages. Five changes.'

Tash rolled her eyes and turned to go, but having got the desired rise out of her, Brett sat up and started acting more human.

'Hey, hey, hang on. I want to ask you a scientific question. Come here.'

He patted the couch beside him. Reluctantly, she sat down.

'I've been thinking,' he began gravely, 'about our position from the scientific point of view, and while it's a little inconvenient for us,' (Brett paused here to admire the sheer elegance of his understatement) 'we are very unique in having this experience. And I've been thinking — ' his tones became more earnest, 'haven't we got a responsibility to explore the situation, and document it — you know, for greater scientific knowledge?'

Brett suspected that if he'd made this speech about anything other than science, Tash would have seen through it right away but she was clearly excited by the idea.

'You're right. What do you think we should do — keep a diary?'

They could be stuck there on the couch all night if he didn't get more direct.

'I think we should have sex.'

She was looking at him dryly.

'I'm serious, Tash. It's the ultimate hidden secret — what is sex really like for the other half? And we could be the only ones to find out.'

After a whole day of thinking about breasts, he was eager enough to get quite a visionary look in his eyes as he made this announcement. Tash found herself becoming interested, though whether for herself or because of the contribution she could make to science, she wasn't sure.

In any case for Tash it was a very potent combination: sex and science. For these two subjects had been linked in her mind ever since the day she first saw Mr Watley.

Mr Watley — his first name was Leon but even now twelve years later, Tash couldn't think of him as Leon Watley — was Tash's science teacher and the first great love of her life. She hadn't realised for quite some time that she was in love with him and afterwards she doubted that anyone else ever noticed. Tash had been an outstanding, intelligent, hard-working student who always sat in the first row in class, who always knew exactly what the teacher was talking about, who always did her homework and always got top marks. She was a failure at social life but by the time she was thirteen, she'd adapted to that and she was in fact glad that the other students left

her alone. She liked to sit in the library, leaf through the latest chemistry periodical and dream about Mr Watley.

He was the only male teacher in her all-girl school, and, as such, gained a certain glamour by distinction. In his thirties, he was not considered young by the girls (though he certainly was by comparison with the rest of the ancient and cobwebby staff). However, in Tash's young mind, his maturity was an attraction surpassed only by that of his tanned legs (glimpsed once in shorts at a weekend tennis camp). He was her tweed-clad idol.

She had always paid attention in every class, but in chemistry she listened so intently to every word Mr Watley said, she could almost hear herself breathing. She waited every day for him to ask her a question so that she could please him by giving the right answer and she excelled herself in her other classes in hopes that the other teachers might mention her favourably to Mr Watley.

But after eighteen months she began to notice that all this industry was going unrewarded. She and Mr Watley were in a rut. He asked her a question. She gave the right answer. He said, 'Thank you, Natasha, that is correct,' and went on with the lesson. He took her for granted, never realising the terror she experienced that this one time she might get the

answer wrong and disappoint him.

Tash began to realise you got a lot more attention from Mr Watley if you misbehaved. There was a group of students who sat down the back of the class. Some of them were intelligent, some not so bright. What they had in common was that they were the fashionable, popular students and they spotted Mr Watley as the perfect teacher to tease. They didn't do their homework, they straggled in late, they did unorthodox things during chemistry experiments. In loud whispers they'd discuss constructing a bomb in the basement to blow up the school.

This little group had three ringleaders: Annette Bunsen, Mandy Weiring, and Davina Westbrook. It was Davina whom Tash hated.

Davina knew all about sex without ever opening a biology textbook. She was always last into class. She was often heard talking about explosives. She never did a single assignment. One day Mr Watley completely lost his temper. 'Davina Westbrook,' he said, 'you are a bad — ' He was clearly about to say 'girl' but he stopped himself in time, 'example!' Davina Westbrook grinned at him cheerfully. Mr Watley stared back at her defeated. Tash's heart filled with rage on his behalf and jealousy on her own. She never ever got Mr Watley's attention like that.

Two days later he routinely asked Tash for the

answer to a question he'd set for homework. She was silent. He glanced briefly at her, thinking she hadn't heard, and repeated the question. She said, 'I haven't done my homework, Mr Watley.'

The whole class fell quiet. Mr Watley paused then merely nodded and went on to the next person. Tash did the same thing for the next fortnight. Mr Watley never commented. Years later she realised that Mr Watley and the other teachers must have consulted together in the common room and agreed that Natasha Trevellyn was having problems at home. Her parents' marriage was probably on the rocks. At the time she was never reprimanded, which made her feel more overlooked by Mr Watley than ever.

Brett and Tash, ten minutes later, were lying side by side in bed. They had all their clothes off but the way Tash lay there, Brett thought, was like she was mentally wearing a white lab coat. Although he'd been thinking about sex all day, Brett was finding now that when he was about to make the great mind/body leap, it was harder than he thought.

Tash had turned towards him solemnly and put her lips in front of his. She also closed her eyes at precisely the same time as if someone had given her instructions in advance.

It all reminded Brett of an alien being told how

to make love to humans. 'Remember that earthlings close their eyes when they kiss. We do not know why they do so but we have conducted research by watching these fabrications which they make of earthlings kissing. These are projected on to large screens in darkened rooms to show other earthlings how it is done. There will also be music and waves crashing onto beaches. We do not yet understand the role of the crashing waves in the procreation of earthlings.'

Brett tried to put these thoughts out of his mind. He closed his eyes and kissed her. Then he had a feeling of being watched and opened them again. She was looking at him. He pulled away.

'What's wrong?'

'I never knew my face went like that,' she said, staring at him curiously. 'All sort of scrunched up.'

He couldn't recall registering whether her face went all scrunched up or not. Tash put her lips back in approved kissing mode, and closed her eyes. He started kissing her again, but this time he pulled away, distracted, and sat up in bed. He was aware of the feel of the sheets on his–her body and he was aware of the warmth of her–his body but he wasn't aware of anything else. He felt that he might as well have been at the dentist for all the sensation he was getting from them kissing. It was *not* his brain. His brain was as

keen on the idea of sex as it usually was. But bodywise he needed some help.

'It's — uh — it's not happening for me,' he mumbled. 'What do you do to get it all working?'

'What do you mean?'

'What do you think about, what do you visualise?'

'My sexual fantasies?' asked Tash, her eyes narrowing.

'Yeah.'

'I'm not telling you!' she exclaimed.

'Come on, Tash,' he chided, 'it's for science. All humanity will thank you.'

He focused on her with a determined seriousness. Neither of them knew it but it was exactly the expression Tash had on her face during her morning confrontations with Harrison, her Chief-of-Staff at the newspaper. She was suspicious but eventually, out of duty to science, she gave in.

'Mr Watley, my chemistry teacher ... '

Brett was hanging on her words.

'Says ... '

Tash hung her head.

' ... "You haven't done your homework. You are a very bad girl." '

Brett burst out laughing.

'That's it?' he managed to get out.

Highly offended, Tash got up and left the room.

But her body, that Brett now occupied, had remembered Mr Watley. It remembered Mr Watley, tall and slim and serious, with his jacket over his shoulder and his briefcase in his hand, backlit by the morning sun as he walked ahead of her into the chemistry block. It remembered Mr Watley working out an equation on the blackboard, his hand stretching up to make a point so that you could see the fine golden-brown hairs on his arms. It remembered Mr Watley glancing at her quickly with those light grey eyes when he asked her a question. It remembered Mr Watley giving a rare shy smile when he was very pleased or impressed. And it remembered Mr Watley confronting the sexy, rebellious Davina Westbrook, his face going white with suppressed anger while Tash watched, feeling rage on his behalf but at the same time thinking, 'He never looks at me like that. He really doesn't know that I exist.'

Brett exclaimed, 'No — wait!'

But Tash had gone. He sank back upon the pillows. A warm sensation was filling his–her body from his–her scalp right down to the soles of their — Brett thought in the circumstances it was definitely *their* — feet.

Harrison, Chief-of-Staff at the *Australian*, was very surprised to observe next morning that Natasha Trevellyn was sitting with her feet up on her desk reading *Rolling Stone*. This was such unusual behaviour for her that Harrison stopped and looked at her for a minute. She had good legs too, he noted. Then he realised that *Rolling Stone* must be doing a science special. Damn! he scowled, thinking that this would provide Trevellyn with ammunition for getting more scientific articles in the *Australian*.

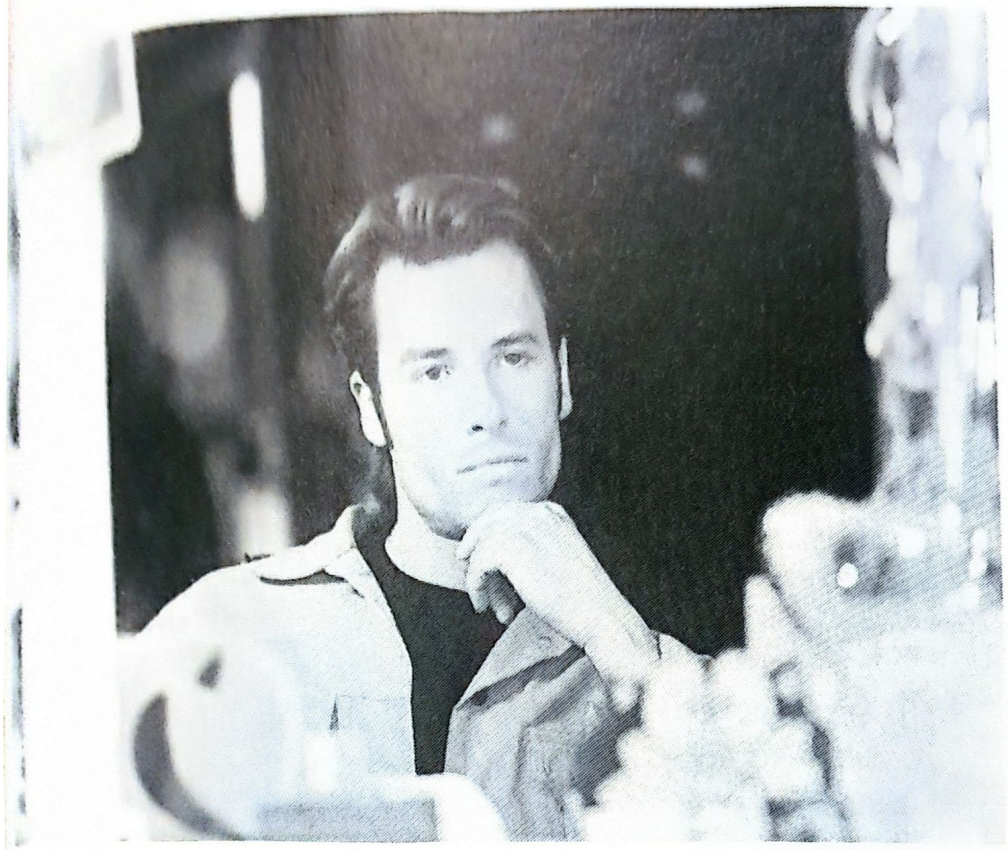
Brett, suddenly conscious of being watched, glanced up and saw Harrison's scowl. He put the magazine down, swung his legs off the desk and started typing enthusiastically, or appearing to type enthusiastically. Actually he was playing a video game. When Harrison next glanced at him, Brett gave Tash's Chief-of-Staff an angelic smile.

However once Harrison disappeared into a meeting, Brett swung his feet back up on the desk, admired his own legs, and rang Rob's number.

Brett still found it a shock to hear Rob call him by Tash's name. Rob sounded surprised to be rung by Tash and, Brett noted, rather pleased.

'Nice to hear from you,' he said warmly, 'how are you?'

'Fine. Look, Rob — ' Brett dropped his voice although no one was in earshot, 'I'm ringing about

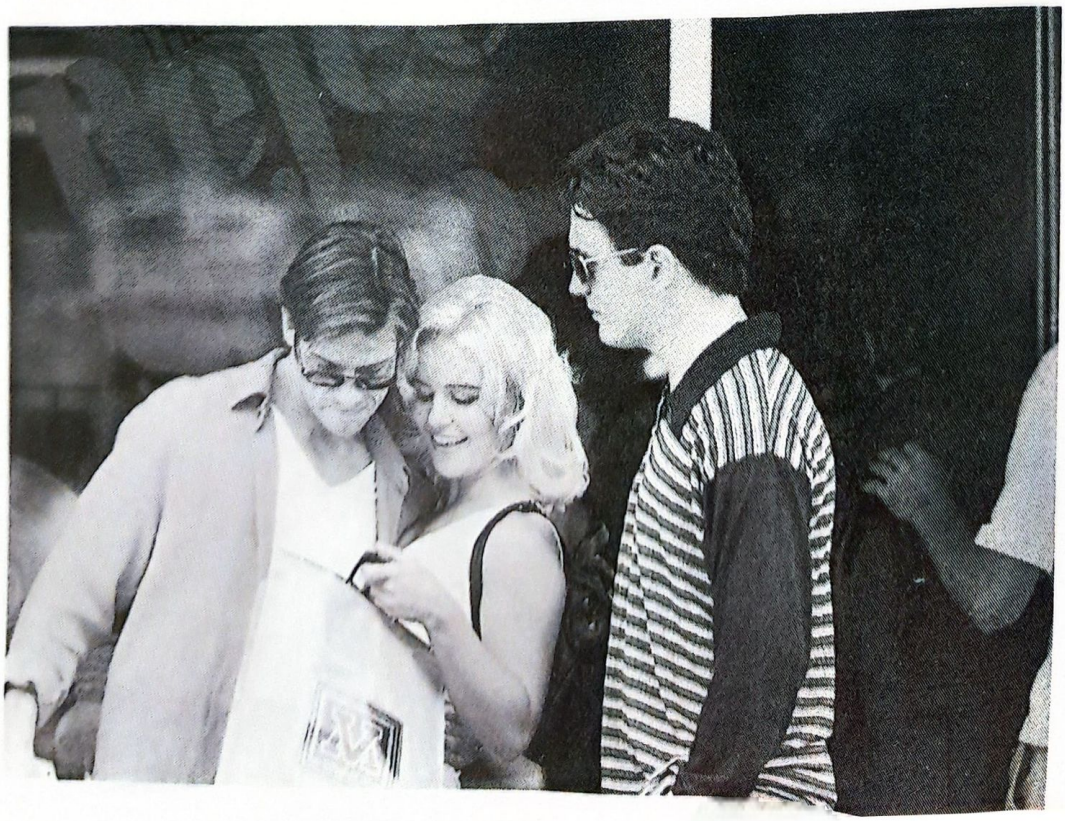


Above: 'Teeth — good. Hair — fantastic.' Brett (Guy Pearce) checks himself out.

Below: Brett flirts with singer Christine Anu on the 'express' set.

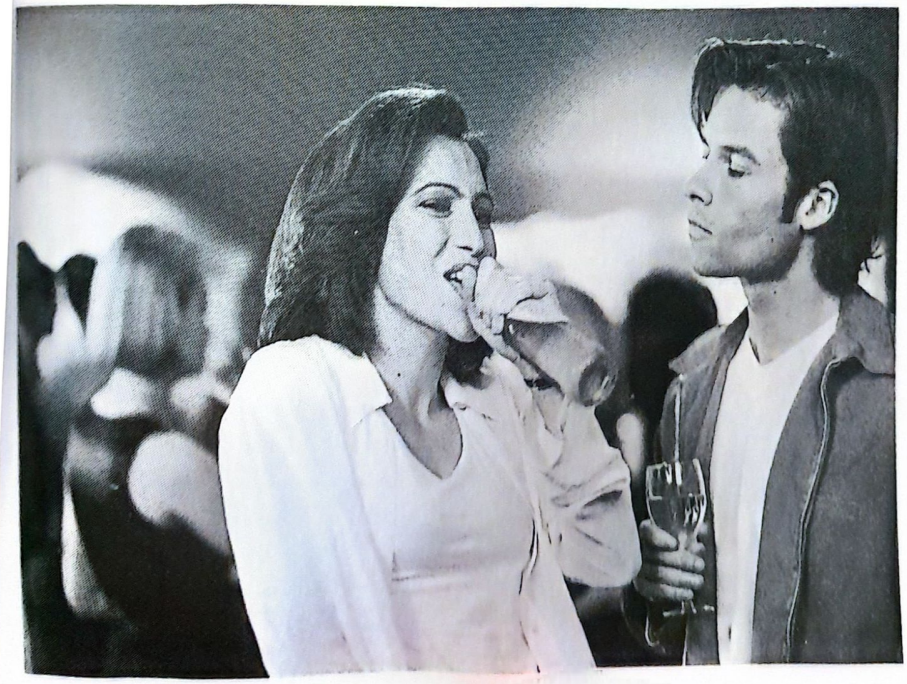
Left: Tash (Claudia Karvan) on the job in the newspaper office.

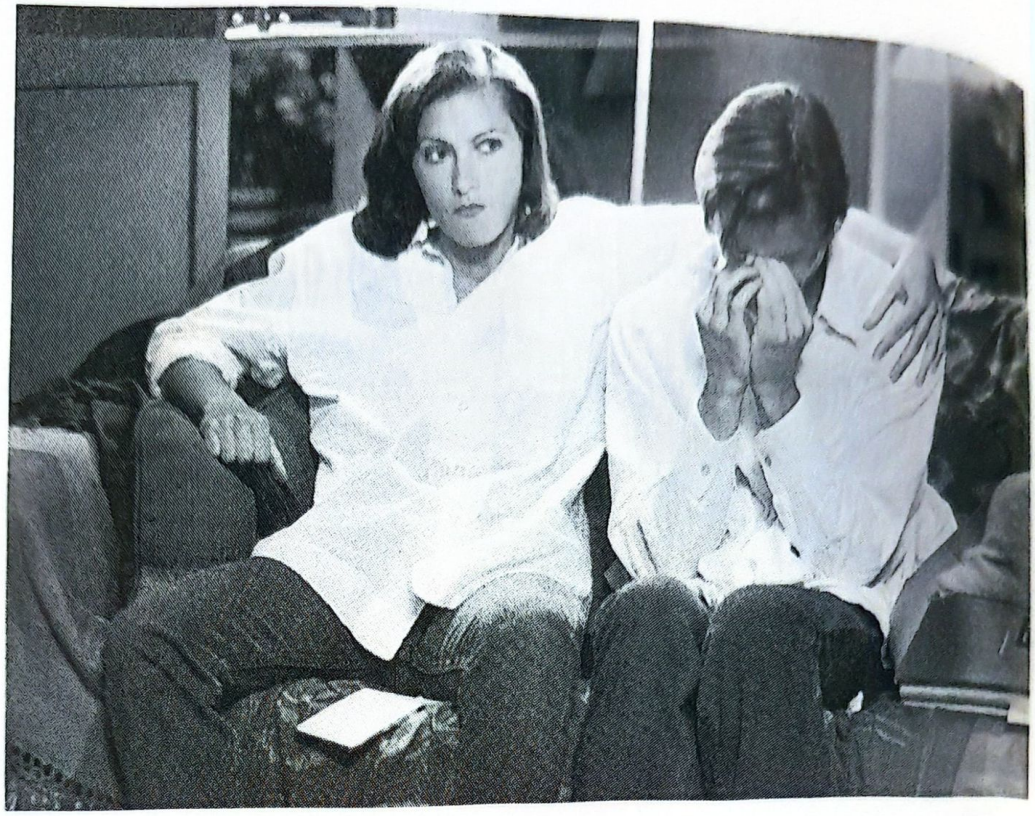
Below: Colette (Pippa Grandison) gets Guy in the bag (she thinks!), while Rob (Matt Day) looks on.



Above: Tash (left, in Brett's body) is restrained by Brett.

Below: At the photo exhibition, Brett (left, in Tash's body) enjoys a beer while Tash clutches her white wine.





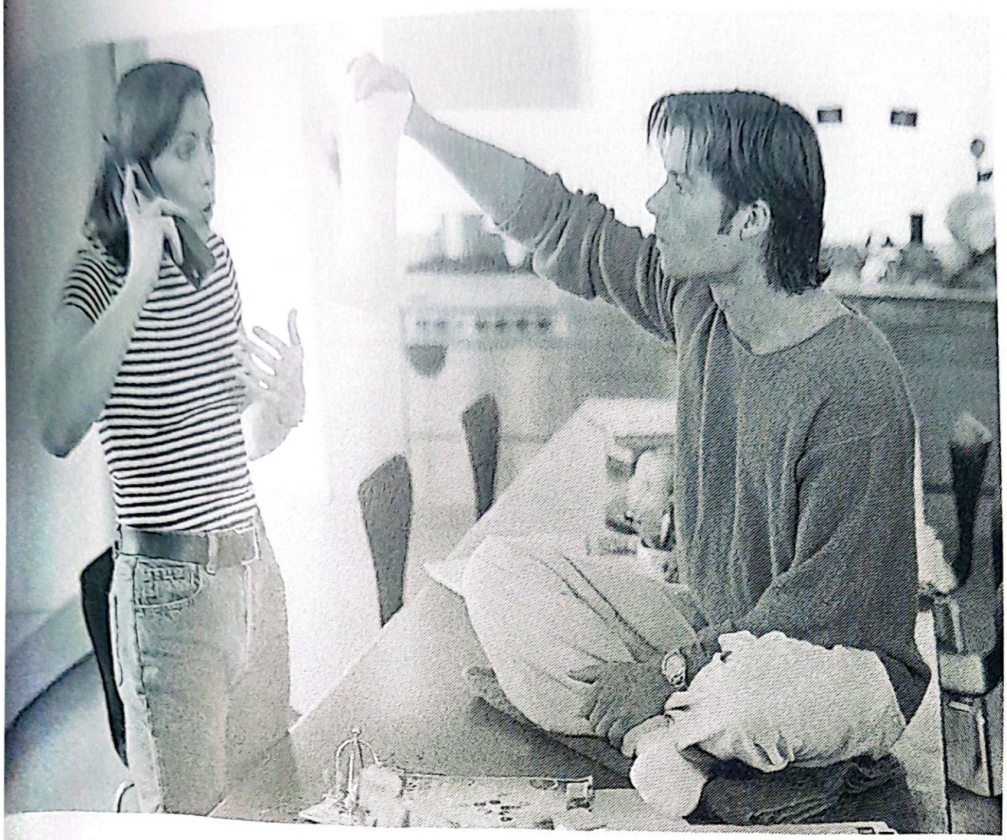
Above: Brett (left, in Tash's body) comforts Tash.

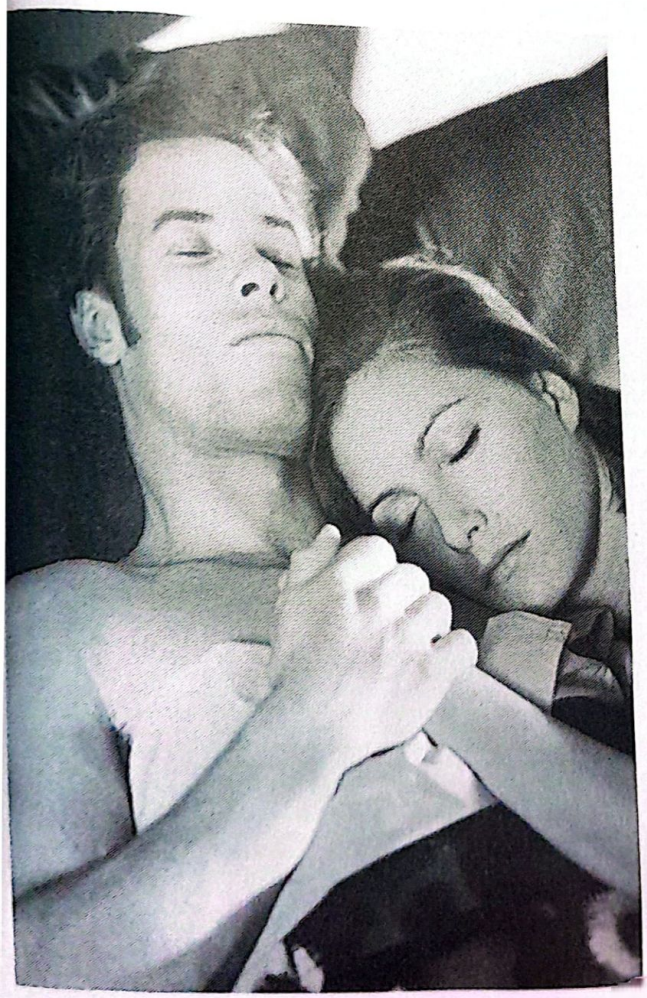
Below: 'I want my flat back!' Brett loses it.

Tash (in Brett's body) plays basketball with the boys.

Left: Brett (in Tash's body) watches the big interview from the wings of the 'express' set.

Below: Brett (right, in Tash's body) questions Laetitia (Lisa Hensley) about the female orgasm.





Above: Tash (in Brett's body) coaches Brett (in Tash's body) on the elusive interview that will make her career.

Left: Brett and Tash sleep as the full moon rises.

Brett. He's been pretty weird lately. I was wondering if anyone's noticed anything at work?'

He'd spent the morning rehearsing this speech and thinking that Rob was going to smell a rat (though exactly what sort of rat, male or female, wasn't clear to him). However, Rob merely said, 'No, I don't think so.'

Like it was not an issue. Brett closed his eyes and thought, 'Thank you, god!'

'What about the New York job?' he tried to sound casual. 'Any news yet?'

'No, not yet.' Brett slumped in disappointment but Rob's tones were now brightening.

'Actually, Tash, I was just thinking of you. They're auditioning for a new reporter on the science show here, and I thought maybe you'd be interested. It'd be fun to have you working round here.'

Brett, astounded, stared at the receiver he was holding as if it had suddenly developed a life of its own. Tash on T.V.! he thought.

'Thanks Rob,' he said, 'but I'm happy here at the good old paper. Anyway, I'm too stiff and straight for T.V., don't you think?'

'No, you'd be great. Keep it in mind anyway.'

'Oh, I will,' said Brett. 'See you later.'

He put the phone down saying to himself, 'The guy is demented.' He hoped he hadn't spoken clearly

because he realised then that Helen MacMahon, the fifty-plus political reporter, was standing by his desk holding out a message.

Helen MacMahon was surveying him carefully. The previous day when Tash Trevellyn had asked her for a cup of coffee, she'd assumed it was some tedious office joke and had merely snapped back an automatic retort and continued on her way. But soon after that Helen's finely-honed political instincts started telling her that there was something going on here. Something had happened to Trevellyn, something big.

No one else had seemed to notice it but MacMahon could not imagine how they could all have missed it. Tash Trevellyn was — there was no other word for it — a completely new person. Where she used to march energetically about the office, she now glided, relaxed, casual, at her ease. She no longer ambushed Harrison. She'd dropped her story in his tray this morning in a manner that was almost off-hand. All day yesterday she'd gazed boredly into space while today she was playing computer games. And then there was her hair. Actually her hair had been the first thing that Helen noticed. Trevellyn's hair had all of a sudden stopped subsiding into her eyes. It had started sitting up and back off her face of its own accord. Well, maybe there was some Fudge in it.

She looked somehow more confident. Almost,

Helen MacMahon thought, over-confident. She had taken to giving big smiles when she walked into the room as if she was doing an ad for a discount teeth warehouse. When she'd smiled at Harrison just now — MacMahon stopped herself right there and went back to the beginning. Smiled at Harrison just now.

Never in all the time she'd seen them together had she ever seen Trevellyn smile at Harrison and Harrison — hadn't he been looking at her legs earlier? Well, that was it. Harrison and Trevellyn: *of course*.

'Some Professor Kamins called while you were out,' she said to Brett handing him a slip of paper with the message.

'Thanks, sweetheart,' said Brett.

Trevellyn was now so puffed up with her own importance that she was speaking to her, Helen MacMahon, as if she was the office gofer. Helen's mind immediately started to connect this with the other things she had noticed. She'd seen Trevellyn playing video games instead of working. It was clear she'd lost all interest in her science reporting. And she was treating her, Helen, like she was a nobody. This could only mean one thing. She was after Helen's job! And now she was screwing Harrison she knew that she could persuade him to dump MacMahon and install her, Tash Trevellyn, as the paper's political reporter. Despite the fact she probably wouldn't

recognise a politician if she fell over one.

Brett, unaware that Helen MacMahon regarded her job as the most desirable in the universe, wondered what the hell her problem was. He shook his head to himself as she walked away, then screwed up the note she'd given him and threw it in the bin.

But Helen was wrong in thinking that no one else in the office had noticed the change in Tash Trevellyn. Marx, the sub-editor, had also seen it. He'd been mystified. He was used to Trevellyn hanging around behind him, reading over his shoulder and quizzing him about the addition, or removal, of every comma. He kept glancing over his shoulder, expecting her to do her usual routine of pretending to get a drink from the water cooler, but she didn't leave her desk. Finally he said, 'Tash, you've used "sub-atomic particle" a few times here. I'm going to replace one of them with "molecule" — that's all right, isn't it?'

He expected her to come hurtling over like a lioness looking after her cub but she barely glanced at him as she said, 'Sounds fine to me, pal.'

This pleased Marx immensely and he looked through the article for further sentences he could improve.

As a result, by the end of the following day, half the city's science teachers had angrily thrown their copies of the *Australian* in the nearest bin while the

other half, who were equally angry, had carefully clipped out Natasha Trevellyn's article and put it in their briefcases. They were going to take it to school next day to show their students what poor coverage major newspapers gave to scientific discoveries of ground-breaking importance. However, way way out in the suburbs on the edge of the city, a handful of commuters, who arrived home very late due to various breakdowns and other assorted failures of the city's transit system, were surprisingly serene. They had a sense of intellectual achievement. For the first time in their lives they had fully understood the science article in the *Australian*. At last those journalists were getting it right.

Six

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A TOTALLY HAPPENING SHOW

TASH

All my life,' I kept saying to myself, 'all my life I've tried — ' I was about say, 'I have tried to be accurate, to be precise.' But I stopped. I wasn't in my life any more. I was in Brett's body and all the world thought that I was him. Except him. And my best friend. She thought I was a cockroach.

All he had had to do was go into the *Australian* office with one computer disk and two pages of copy and a message for Harrison and Marx. Ground-breaking research; page five, no changes. One disk, two sheets of paper, three instructions and what had happened? Well, the article certainly was on page five. For the first time ever in my soon-to-be concluded career at the *Australian*, the story was on the page it deserved to be on. Or would have deserved to be on if it had borne any resemblance to the story I'd written.

'You've destroyed my reputation,' I hissed over the phone to Brett. I could see it happening. Every

science teacher, every academic, half the students would be e-mailing the *Australian*: 'As your science reporter, Natasha Trevellyn, should be aware' / 'Does your science reporter, Natasha Trevellyn, not know' / 'Perhaps your science reporter, Natasha Trevellyn, should be reminded' that there is a difference between sub-atomic particles and molecules. Harrison would be delighted. It wouldn't prove to him the importance of accurate sub-editing, he'd see it as an excuse to get rid of me.

I read through the article again in Brett's office with tears in my eyes. Molecules, molecules! Marx had gone through it scattering molecules about like a flower girl with confetti at a wedding.

'Your 'flu still bad?' The tone was sympathetic. The P.A. was standing before me with a cup of tea. I'd noticed that she'd adjusted to the fact that somehow since last week I'd mysteriously given up cappuccinos and started drinking tea. I nodded and blew my nose. Brett would kill me if he knew that I'd been sitting in his office crying. Except that with the way things were going, I was likely to kill him first.

'I didn't ask to do any of this,' he was saying as if I'd imposed some unreasonable burden upon him.

'Don't you realise,' I went on, 'that it's gobbledegook. Any trained person who reads it will think I'm an idiot, Brett — '

'Don't say *that*,' he interrupted. For a second I thought he meant that I shouldn't be so hard on myself and then I realised he meant, 'Don't use my name.' We had to remember not to say each other's names when we were talking. As Brett said, if anyone overheard us they would think we were totally mad. On the other hand, we both found it impossible to use our own names because that made *us* feel totally mad. I couldn't call him Tash. He couldn't call me Brett. So we tried to avoid calling each other anything. Anything printable, that is.

'Harrison will sack me,' I went on, 'and after this no one else will want to employ me. The science writer who can't tell sub-atomic particles from molecules. I'll end up writing the newsletter for the Flat Earth Society.'

I could feel him controlling himself with deep careful breaths at the other end of the line and this made me even angrier.

'The Flat Earth Society will probably be thrilled to have high-profile talk show host, Brett Flinders, coming to work for them. Imagine the publicity.'

To my satisfaction I heard something that was a cross between a moan and a curse at the other end of the line. It was time Brett reminded himself that I might not want to be in his body but I was now in a very good position to ruin his life.

He came to the television station that afternoon to watch the taping of the show. I was still upset about my story and really hadn't thought much about the show. All I had to do was give the introduction and ask a few questions. It was not at all in the same league as getting your mind around a big breakthrough in electro-magnetics research and then converting this into concepts that the public could understand.

'Remember,' Brett was saying, 'that you have to *relax* and *smile*. It's harder than it looks.'

He had started fiddling with my clothes. His clothes. Adjusting the collar and the jacket and then stepping back and saying, 'It doesn't look right. What's wrong with it?' The P.A. came in just then and I stopped myself in time from saying, 'It's because I'm wearing it, not you.'

He gave the belt a sharp tug as he did it up more tightly. I said icily as we went to the studio, 'When it's your job you're concerned enough, aren't you? I'm a real journalist. I know how to interview people.'

I didn't feel quite so confident as I walked into the studio though. It was hot, the lights were blinding. Everyone was in position, all of them doing their jobs, and all of them were focused on me. I realised as I took up my position on Brett's couch that I was half-expecting someone to say, OK, it's your first time, just

relax, take it slow ... but, of course, no one knew it was my first time. They thought I was Brett. The face was Brett's. The body was Brett's. The voice was Brett's. But inside was me, Tash. The studio had suddenly gone very quiet. The Floor Manager had started the countdown. There was a sudden flicker of movement amongst the figures in the darkness at the edge of the set and I realised Brett was frantically signalling at me. He was moving his hands — my hands — and I realised that I'd been clinging to the arm of the sofa as if it was my last hope of life. Now he was pointing like a maniac at his teeth. I ran my tongue over mine, thinking perhaps I had some salad caught there, but this made him shake his head even more frantically.

The countdown reached zero. It took me a few seconds to realise the camera was on me. I desperately wanted to ask, 'Sorry, this is my first time, can we do it again?' Then I remembered that I couldn't say that. They would think Brett had amnesia. He'd been doing the show for a year. The words I was supposed to say had gone right out of my head. I became conscious that I'd been sitting there just staring at the camera. Then I remembered the intro: 'And hi and welcome to a really happening show tonight that's crammed with the hottest and the latest ... '

Except it didn't come out like that. My mouth was

dry. My throat had stopped working properly. The introduction came out in two-word lots. It sounded like an announcement in a train of what stations are coming up: Andhi, Andwelcome, Toareally, Happening, Showtonight, That scrammed ...

Somewhere, someone said, 'Cut.' And, 'Let's try again,' and, with some surprise, 'Right when you are, Brett.'

I would like to say that things got better on the second take but I don't recall that they did. We did it again and again. Sometimes I started out confidently and then faltered. Sometimes I began badly and then improved. But either way as soon as I saw the 'that's crammed' coming up, I would begin to get nervous. Sometimes I got through it and felt as if I landed safely on the other side and then I'd find that I'd been over-confident and I would make a mistake on the next most important word so that it would come out as, 'That scrammed with the hostess.'

'Fifteen takes. Just for the intro! I told you — relax and smile.'

We were back at my place. I couldn't even think about eating but Brett had a large pizza. I followed him into the lounge room where he was settling down to eat it, saying (for about the fifteenth time also), 'I was nervous. I *said* sorry.'

He picked up the remote and turned the T.V. on. I

realised with horror that he was going to watch the show. I couldn't believe it and said to him as I heard the familiar theme music, 'What are you doing? We're not going to go through it again are we?'

'Yes,' he said grimly, thrusting a big slice of pizza towards his mouth — my mouth — 'I want to see it again. I want to watch you wreck my career right before my eyes.'

'I did my best!' I said.

Brett groaned in pain as my — his — face appeared on the T.V.

'You make me look like a dead person.'

Unwillingly I looked at the screen. It was Brett's face and body there on the screen but that relaxed cheeky charm he had was gone. The Brett on the screen looked sort of transfixed. As if he'd received very bad news. All his family had been lost at sea. Or the dry-cleaner really couldn't get that stain off the lapel of his new jacket.

He closed his eyes, groped like a blind man for the remote and switched the T.V. off again. For a minute I felt sympathetic and then I remembered sitting there for the first time under all those hot blinding lights, trying to smile and feeling my lips start to quiver and stumbling again and again through that awful introduction, 'Andhi and welcome — ' Who starts an intro with 'And' for godsakes! Then seeing

the awful 'That scrammed with the lottest — sorry — hottest and the lottest, latest. Sorry!'

I had *tried*. Whereas he — all he'd had to do was take my disk and story into the office and give them the message. And he hadn't even managed that! I exploded.

'I'm sick of this! I'm doing my job *and* your job. From now on you can do my job on your own. I bet you won't do it any better than I've done yours!'

'Oh, really?' he said. 'OK you're on.'

He picked up another slice of pizza and started wolfing it. The sight of this irritated me.

'And stop putting so much food *into* my body!'

'It's not your body at the moment.'

'Well you don't know how long you are going to be in it,' I pointed out, 'and the world's a hard place for a fat woman, as you may well have time to find out. You'll have to exercise as well. I'm not going to have two years of slogging it out in that gym wasted on pizzas I don't even get to eat.'

He didn't answer. He just reached out and picked up the last slice and raised it to his mouth. 'And what if I don't?'

I leaned back casually in my chair and ran my fingers through his hair in just the same way he used to do and which — I'd noticed — he still tried to do sometimes, but it didn't work with my hair.

'I might have a sudden desire to perm my hair —' I said airily. 'Perhaps a new colour —'

He kicked out viciously at the coffee table — at my coffee table — with one of the my best black shoes.

'I want my life back!' he yelled.

'I want my flat back!' I screamed in return.

The neighbours downstairs clearly wanted peace and quiet. They banged on the ceiling. Brett leant towards me threateningly.

'And what are people going to think?' he spat. 'Laetitia comes over to visit you, and what do you say — I'm living at your place? I mean you're living at your place. You're living at my place. It's a joke.'

'Stop it!' I said, not quite sure what I was telling him to stop.

Brett took a controlled deep breath, and looked at me grimly. 'We'll have to swap apartments,' he said.

He looked as if it was the hardest thing he'd ever said. I knew he was no keener on the idea than I was. I imagined myself over in his apartment with all the furniture watching me to make sure I straightened the cushions every time I got up from a chair. But there was no alternative. I finally said grudgingly, 'OK. I'll go and pack my things.'

'What things? You're not going to get much chance to wear your dresses or your lipstick.'

I hesitated. It's a very odd feeling to walk out of your own place and go somewhere new to live, even if only temporarily (we hoped), without a single solitary thing that you are used to having around you. But it was true. I didn't need to take any clothes or the usual things I'd take on a trip. All the usual things were superfluous. I felt a little lost and then said, 'My toothbrush.'

'Use my toothbrush,' he said curtly.

'I'm not going to use your toothbrush,' I said, disgusted.

'Why not? It's going in my mouth.'

'Give me the keys!'

He hesitated. I put out my hand. He pulled his keys out of his pocket, but held them dangling uncertainly above my open palm. Finally, reluctantly, he let them drop.

I had imagined in advance that walking into Brett's flat I'd feel like an exile. Put out of my normal place and into this completely different environment, but in fact it felt quite liberating. I wasn't an impostor, I told myself as I walked in. I had a right to be here. I dumped the bundle of Brett's clothes that I was carrying down on the glass and steel dining table and dared it to protest. I was going to let Brett's apartment know that I wasn't any happier about this

arrangement than it was, but I was in charge. I went over to his enormous record collection, flicked through and picked one out.

'Brett's favourite record,' I informed my new surroundings. There wasn't a murmur in response either from the space-age looking lounge or the severe imported lamp in the far corner. I remembered how he always said, 'Clean it first, Tash, these records are worth a lot of money.' I rubbed it on the front of my designer shirt, gave the furniture a grin and put it on.

Nothing was going to stop me. I wasn't going to camp in this place like a refugee. I went into the bedroom, found Brett's favourite leather jacket, Brett's favourite baseball cap and Brett's dark glasses and I put them all on.

To admire the effect properly, I went into the bathroom to stand before the large mirror. I looked at myself. I was tall and lean with broad shoulders and a perfectly flat stomach. I pushed up the sleeve of my jacket and flexed his biceps. And I suddenly realised I was strong.

I don't know why this had not occurred to me before but I was now aware that I filled more space, I was bigger. And I could reach, stretch, lift things that in the past had been too high, too large, too heavy. There was a chair by the door. I stretched out and picked it up and held it over my head with one hand. I

felt like Superman holding a hand out and stopping a runaway bus.

I walked around the apartment lifting things in the sheer enjoyment of this new physical strength. I was holding all the city phone books high above my head when something fell from one. As I was putting the books back down, I glanced at it and saw it was a drink coaster. I picked it up. On the back was written, but not in Brett's handwriting, 'Colette' and a phone number.

I'd been right. *Louse.*

BRETT

I was tidying up the bedroom when she rang. The first thing I'd done after she left was go in there and look around despairingly. I have never understood how anyone with such a systematic rigorous mind, which can retain so much information and process it so fast, can bear to live in such complete chaos. And I am talking serious chaos here. Tash is the only person I've known who's managed to lose all the pillows in her bedroom. I am not talking modest, flat worn-out pillows which could get shy and hide under the bed. I am talking huge pillows, two of which were those extra large European style ones. This is a woman who could go out and look at the night sky and name any star you pointed to. But she's never understood any of

the simple principles of being tidy like put your socks at one end of your drawer and your underwear at the other. Or even more simple things, like putting your shoes on the floor and your clothes on the rack, not the other way round.

One day, shortly after we started going out, she said wistfully to me, 'I would like, just once, to find something without looking for it.'

It didn't seem kind to tell her that whole sections of the human race had actually solved this problem and had now moved on to attempting ground-breaking research in that last great frontier of human knowledge where you got to answer the really big question: what happens to all those missing socks?

Instead I said, 'You found me without looking for me. Although I had a bit of trouble finding you under all those clothes.'

She laughed at that and walked into my open arms but as I hugged her, I couldn't help thinking about those missing pillows and what it could mean. I made a resolve, there and then, that if I ever got the 'flu, I would never stay at Tash's apartment. I imagined me losing consciousness and getting lost in the chaos. By the time Tash found me again after moving the usual mountain of clothes, books, scientific journals, computer paper and the clean linen laundry that should have been put away three months

I would be comatose and near death.

But now I sat there, a castaway on this island of debris, and I thought, what the hell is all this stuff she's got here?

I cleaned the dirty tea cups, apple cores, and floppy disks from the top of her dressing table, and opened the first drawer. I poked my way through it — nothing much to report, just a lot of old navy cottontails and single socks — when suddenly I came across something black and lacy. It was a corset, one of those ones which include a bra and have suspenders to hold up stockings.

Tash, baby! I haven't seen this little number before, I thought.

I love those things. I was instantly out of my sensible going-to-the-office suit and underwear and into this desirable number. I was posing in front of the mirror admiring the effect and doing my best Swedish porn star poses when the phone rang. I picked it up still in my reverie.

'Louse!' she snapped into the phone, and hung up. I looked around uneasily.

What has she got in here, I thought, surveillance cameras?

I got a kick start into my new full-time life as Tash next morning when I heard the phone ringing while I

was in the shower and came out to hear Laetitia's voice saying, 'Rise and shine, Tash. Open your eyes. Look over the edge of the bed. See if you can find a bare patch of floor to put your feet on. Put your feet on it and get vertical.'

There were a couple more instructions like this from which I deduced that (a) Laetitia had the same attitude to Tash's housekeeping capacities as I did (although the one time I said anything about this in Laetitia's presence, she'd made a crack about how she was sure it was important to me not to have any clutter around because it might divert attention from me). And (b) if Laetitia was in the habit of leaving messages this lengthy, Tash must have the world's longest answerphone tape.

At just that point the tape clicked off but Laetitia didn't skip a beat. She must have simply redialled, waited while Tash went through her please-leave-a-message patter and then started talking again as if nothing had happened. It was then that I realised that this was their routine. Laetitia was on her car phone, driving to work, and she just talked away on the message tape until Tash shook herself awake, fought her way through the chaos to the phone and took up her side of the conversation.

I was still damp from the shower though, plus tired from having spent a hard six hours the previous

night getting Tash's bedroom to a state where I'd be comfortable waking up in the morning and I wasn't feeling up to dealing with hell on high heels, so I stood and listened to Laetitia while she chattered away. She was mostly talking about Paul and Christina's amazing transformation from platonic friends to soon-to-be newlyweds. Christina and Laetitia had had dinner together the previous night and Christina seemed to have thoroughly debriefed Laetitia. I was standing there listening to all this scandal thinking, 'Go on Laetitia, this tape could be worth a fortune,' when she said, 'But I'll save all that for Saturday, we have a gym date remember?' There was a slight pause, then her voice came again, 'I guess you're over at Brett's.' She hung up then.

She said *Brett* so coldly it gave me goosebumps. I decided, of course, that I'd rather eat sand than spend a Saturday voluntarily with Laetitia, but by the time the day arrived, the invitation was looking slightly more appealing. I didn't like Laetitia any more than she liked me but I'm a people sort of guy and it's only when you find yourself in someone else's body that you realise how lonely life can be when you really are out of your normal surroundings. The people at Tash's office all seemed to take a fix of a drug called 'Dull-and-preoccupied' every morning (quite a few of them had booster shots at lunchtime too) and not one of

them is interesting enough to distract me from my current video game for more than half a minute.

Tash's other friends, apart from Laetitia, were mostly people she met doing her science degree at uni. When we met them together as a couple, they'd talk about non-scientific things, but I suspected that when they were alone with her, they'd really want to get down and swap stories about sub-atomic particles. I knew I wouldn't be able to keep up my side of the conversation, or even stay awake. Laetitia, Christina, Paul, Rob and I were the only civilians. I could understand Laetitia's job as the editor of a beauty magazine which is more than I could say for the jobs of Tash's science boffin mates.

Also, as I knew already, Laetitia's relationship with Tash was pretty frank and open. I felt that if I made a major mistake in passing myself off as Tash, she'd either excuse it on the grounds that that dreadful Brett was treating me badly, or she'd ask me outright what was going on.

It was exactly this sort of thing that worried me about Tash passing herself off as me. I had a basketball game booked with Rob and some guys on Saturday morning and I knew that Tash would probably go and play. She was a reasonable player — for a girl — and it wasn't the game that worried me. I had a twitchy feeling about her and Rob. I could sense

she was wanting to confide in someone like she was used to confiding in Laetitia, and I didn't want it to be Rob. Not *my* best friend. You can know your life is being blown to pieces but you still need to know where the pieces are, in hopes of being able to put it all together again. I wanted to check out how she was with him — I also wanted to see how she played. The basketball courts were next to the gym where I was to meet Laetitia so I had an excuse for being there. When I got into the newspaper office, I range Laetitia and made the arrangements.

Saturday morning I realised exactly how right I'd been to worry. As I was coming towards the gates to the courts, I saw Tash cycling up on my bike wearing a distinctly ungroovy pink tennis shade. Where had she found that? I was sure it wasn't mine. Then I had a memory of someone wearing it when a group of guys had come round for drinks after a game. It had been left behind and I'd put it in the hall cupboard for when the owner came to collect it but, of course, he'd wisely abandoned it. To the long list of resolutions I was now making about how I'd live my life when I returned to my own body I added another resolve: I will throw out tasteless items of clothing left at my place by other people.

Fortunately Rob, who was waiting for her by the gate, wasn't the sort of person to spend a long time

wondering why I was wearing a pink tennis shade but I saw, as I came up to them, that he did look a bit startled when he raised his hand to Tash to do our special high five handshake and she didn't notice. He was left standing there with his hand in the air, like a statue of a Red Indian.

She was squatting to lock up the bike and he was turned towards her so that they didn't notice my approach. He said to her, 'I'm really gonna wipe the floor with you today, joker.'

I was just about to call out, 'Hi,' when I heard her reply, 'Robbie, I don't know if I feel like it. Can't we just have breakfast and talk?'

My heart sank. Two major gaffes in under a quarter of a minute. Rob must have been surprised because he said, 'Miss the game? Give me a break. Get in there! Oh, hi, Tash.'

'Hi, Rob.'

Tash spun around from the bike. I noticed she'd been having trouble with the lock. I gave her a stern look. You're here to play. Get it together then, and play. Better still, pass out now. No, don't do *that*. A headline had popped into my head: BRETT FLINDERS: HEALTH SCARE. COLLAPSE ON BASKETBALL COURT.

Tash was looking at me significantly. Or, to be precise, my eyes were fixed on me significantly but I

could feel her behind them as if she was the driver of a truck that had me, the rabbit, mesmerised by its headlights. She was silently demanding to know what I was doing here.

I smiled at her warmly and she remembered what she was supposed to do.

'Hi — babe,' she said sounding like some fourteen year old who'd just learnt the expression and wasn't sure how to say it.

We kissed really awkwardly, neither of us feeling that our lips (or anything else for that matter) were in the right place. Rob must have been thinking that the Brett–Tash thing was in a very rocky state as he turned and headed towards the courts. Tash and I followed.

'I'm meeting Laetitia,' I explained, 'but I got the time wrong and I got here half an hour early, so I thought I'd come and watch the game.'

I'd rehearsed this explanation a few times in the mirror and it came out so smoothly I almost believed it myself.

As a summary of what happened after that I suppose the question is: is it better to suspect that the worst is happening or to actually see it happening before your own eyes? I had plenty of opportunities to think about that as, trying to convey a mere casual interest, I watched the game.

It began badly. Tash threw the ball in from out of bounds. It was a real girly throw and I saw the others look at her oddly. Then she hung around on the edge of play, clearly a little nervous. After a bit she shook and stretched my arms, as if testing the strength of her new equipment, then took a deep breath and plunged in. A rebound came her way and she launched herself up for it with all her might. To my surprise (and hers) she managed to wrench it away from the others and dunked it, but she almost knocked Rob's head off in the process.

Tash gave a squeal of delight and did the little victory dance that she does when she's thrilled. Rob and the others looked surprised. I closed my eyes and prayed.

When they started again, she went all out again, walloping and shoving, suddenly aware — I realised — of her new-found strength. She beat Rob again. I could feel the others looking at her, annoyed. But to my horror, Tash was clearly very pleased and not trying to hide it. She strutted to the other side of the court and didn't notice that Rob had given her a pissed-off look.

Rob is one of those guys about whom people say, 'He's a nice guy — unless you get him riled.' By which they mean *do not* get him riled. I could see he was riled now and Tash didn't realise. It probably had

never even occurred to her that he had that side to him but the other guys knew it. He had a gleam in his eyes. Apart from pretending to have a seizure (and it would have to be a really loud and noisy one with lots of thrashing about), I couldn't see any way of stopping from happening what I knew was going to happen. I'm a coward, so I looked away from the court for a bit as though I'd found matters of immense architectural interest to scrutinise over to the left.

The noise brought me back. Rob came thundering down the court and belted the ball against the backboard. The force of his hit, the pounding of his feet and the way that they were all yelling would have had Tash *terrified*.

She was really on the run now, red and gasping, everyone was going for her. The ball whizzed past her, nearly hitting her and she yelled in fright. She desperately managed a small shot which dribbled off the backboard. Rob charged forward to reach it, then ploughed backwards to reposition himself and crashed smack into Tash. She was thrown to the ground with the breath knocked out of her.

Rob turned and looked at her. I prayed, I prayed. I said to myself, Tash, don't say anything, please. Just get up and grin. Limp if you've got to, wince even, but for godsakes, *grin*. Even if all your teeth fall out in the process. She said, 'Oh, Robbie, you hurt me!'

Fortunately, Rob is a nice guy and must have thought he'd really done some serious damage for me to have reacted like this.

'Sorry, man,' he said, very surprised, 'my foul. Your ball.'

I couldn't face it any more. I slunk off to meet Laetitia.

She was waiting for me in the foyer of the gym. She gave me a kiss which was a bit of a surprise, imagine if I had to kiss Rob every time I saw him, and we walked into the change room with her talking away about some drama at her office and me thinking about the drama I'd just seen on the court. It wasn't until we were inside the women's change rooms that I realised I'd died and gone to heaven.

I suppose every heterosexual guy has fantasised about breaking into a harem on the residents' bath day and being able to perve at beautiful women of all shapes and sizes, colours and ages, in all stages of undress. It wasn't quite on that scale, the women's change room, but it was probably as close to that fantasy as I'll ever get, and I was stoked. One exercise class had obviously just finished and there were other women arriving for the next session. So there were women everywhere getting dressed and undressed. I knew not to stare but I've had twenty years of

xperience in the art of not staring at women while not missing a thing and I even managed to ask Laetitia an interested-sounding question about her office drama while noting that I had seen seven Cs, two very nice Bs, a couple of forgettables and one B minus. Then, as I was standing up after putting on my shoes, I saw a pair of truly classic Bs above a gorgeous pair of hips. My eyes slid upwards and then I realised. It was Laetitia.

Faced with this dream team I felt duty-bound to say something.

'Laetitia — I never noticed you had such a hot body. You really are ... *curvy*.'

She gave me an odd look and then pulled on her T-shirt.

'*You* can see that, but what good does it do me? Hips are definitely out. Men don't lust after women with curves.'

They don't?

'How do you know?' I asked. 'They might.'

She said ironically, raising her eyebrows, 'They better not. I've just written the whole summer issue about it.'

Tash and Laetitia's aerobics class was a further revelation. I had expected your basic fifty minutes of hyper-activity, bouncing up and down, arching,

waving and stretching like a convention of hens on speed. But no. Tash and Laetitia's class was held in the usual aerobics area but there was none of the stretching, jumping, etc. that I'd been expecting. Well, to be accurate there was, but it was in a different configuration. Tash and Laetitia's current favoured mode of exercise, I discovered, was Afro-aerobics.

Two black dudes at the front of the room played conga drums while the instructor led our all-female group through the routine, which consisted mostly of dancing around in a circle in a tribal frenzy. At certain points in the dance everyone let out whoops and yells as we celebrated our inner woman, or saluted Mother Moon, or welcomed warriors home from wherever it is that warriors go to.

As this was all new to me, I kept falling out of rhythm and missing steps and whooping when I should have been yelling. Just when I thought I was finally getting into the swing of the dance steps, the woman next to me turned and began thrusting her pelvis and bust at me while making a kind of growling sound. After my session in the change room followed by fifty minutes of watching women's bodies heave and sway, I began to wish that whatever cosmic forces were responsible for turning me into a woman, would turn me back into a man pronto so I could seize this woman, swing her over my shoulder and take h

to the jungle. Unfortunately, the cosmic forces didn't oblige but if they had, it would have wound the Afro-aerobics class up with a bang. Exactly the sort of finale it needed.

After the ritual dance, I discovered, came the ritual brunch. This took place at what I learned was Laetitia and Tash's favourite café.

I was carrying out my own ritual of reading the paper (music reviews, cartoons and sport, in that order), and wasn't really paying much attention to Laetitia's unending monologue.

'I can't believe Paul and Christina,' she was going on. 'They were friends for, what, eight years? And then they start bonking each other and now they're getting married. I mean, *when did this happen*, and why wasn't I told?' She took a drag of her cigarette, and then I heard, 'And she says the sex is really quite good except that Paul worries because he can't give her a multiple orgasm.'

That gets my attention. I realise that this was what Laetitia had been referring to when she was talking on the tape. I am totally shocked.

'She told you that?'

Women. Can you believe the stuff they talk about? Have Tash and Laetitia talked about her orgasms with me? I was wondering.

'Sure, why wouldn't she?' Laetitia replied, surprised, still on about Paul and Christina.

I thought for a moment. This could be a golden opportunity. There was something I had always wanted to know, but it had never seemed possible to ask.

'Do they really exist?' I said, trying to sound casual. 'I mean, do any women actually have them?'

'God, I don't know. But we still keep writing about them in the magazine. Got to give the guys something to worry about.'

This was disappointing. I wasn't really broadening myself sexually through being a woman. Tash wouldn't sleep with me and Laetitia wouldn't tell me the truth.

TASH

When Brett turned up that Saturday morning to watch me playing basketball with Rob and the other guys, I couldn't work out what he was up to. I certainly didn't believe that story about him turning up early to his date with Laetitia. (Brett — early? Brett who was always unpunctual? I knew that the forces of the cosmos could switch our minds from one body to another. But I did not believe that even they could get Brett Flinders anywhere ahead of time.)

I assumed he'd come to make fun of me, and all I

can say is that he must have had more fun than I did because when Rob bashed into me and knocked me over, I noticed that he seemed to be grinning. I ignored him. I was very shocked and sore. Getting knocked over by Rob was like getting swiped by a semi-trailer. What's more he didn't even offer to help me up. I had to get to my feet and go on playing because he just threw me the ball and none of the others seemed to notice I was limping. I suppose it is a man thing. Amputate your best friend's leg, but don't offer him a stick to walk on or you'll look like you think he's a wuss.

The day did not improve. The main reason I'd gone to the game was because I knew that afterwards Rob and Brett and the others went for a few drinks and I really wanted to have a talk with Robbie. I mean I saw him every day at work but we didn't get much chance for a conversation there.

However, almost the instant we walked into the bar, they all started watching a basketball game on the pub's T.V. I was bemused. I mean they had just *played* a game together. Now they were *watching* a game together. What was the point? They were all just standing there, eyes fixed on the screen. I noted that the very design of a pub seemed intended to prevent conversation. You stood at the counter side by side, and no one had to look at anyone else. I went and sat at a table.

I was wondering if I'd done some serious damage to my left knee when Rob turned away from the T.V. for a second and said, 'You'd better start playing more often, pal, your game's not what it used to be.'

I felt like saying, 'I'm not what we used to be.' Trying to stroll and look unhurt and relaxed, I went back to the bar. He hadn't quite got his full attention back onto the screen.

'How's your love life, Robbie?' I asked.

It seemed to me that somehow half-way through my question, his attention really did get fixed on the T.V. again. He said, 'Oh — you know,' without removing his eyes from the screen.

I said, 'It's important to have a real relationship in this business isn't it? I mean, you can't just survive on a career.'

'Mmm.'

I didn't know what to make of that response. I had read that men liked to talk about their emotional lives in generalities. What I really wanted to say was: 'You work really long hours and go home tired to a flat where you live alone. You don't seem to have a regular girlfriend. Or even a semi-regular one. Don't you get lonely? Do you want to have a relationship? Get married? Have kids?'

I decided maybe my approach had been *too* general. In any case, he *was* Brett's best friend. Surely

he had an opinion on Brett's relationship with me? I had never seen any indication of what his attitude was, and Brett had never reported Rob's opinion. I was direct: 'What do you think about Tash? About her and I. Do you think we should try and get back together?'

He gave me a quick look. I knew that look. It was the look a man gives a woman when she's interrupting his viewing of a game on T.V. Then I remembered that in Rob's eyes, I was a man and I realised he was embarrassed.

'Look — it's none of my business,' he said. 'All I can say is what I've said before.'

If I hadn't been so desperate to know what he had said before, his tone would have shut me up. It was a mixture of irritated and very uncomfortable and though I'd known Rob a number of years I'd never heard him speak that way before. And I knew what he was telling me to do. I was supposed to be standing there like the rest of them, watching the game on T.V. as if it was some amazing event unlikely to be witnessed again in our lifetimes. But I was desperate to know what he thought. I really wanted — needed — to hear someone else's opinion on whether my relationship with Brett had any future.

Every six months or so Laetitia's magazine published an article on how to get over a love affair

('Wash That Man Right Out Of Your Hair'). Laetitia said it was great for sales. I don't know if any of the advice actually worked. It was all about throwing out physical reminders of him, putting his photographs into storage somewhere inaccessible, and not driving by his place. But I knew that I was most definitely not in a position where I could apply any of it. I could not try-and-keep-busy-and-stop-thinking-about-Brett. The whole world thought I *was* Brett. I could not forget about him no matter how busy I was. I knew that we regarded ourselves as broken up but then, we were in each other's bodies. In those times when I wasn't worrying about the present, I couldn't help thinking about the future and wondering what was going to happen. Whether there was still a chance or whether it was definitely over and whether I still wanted it to have a chance or whether I really wanted it to be over. I was keen to hear someone else's views, especially when that person knew us both well.

I said with studied casualness as though his opinion really had slipped my mind, 'And what was that again?'

'I don't think she's the woman for you.'

I stared at him, completely taken aback, but he didn't notice. On the T.V. an amazing play was being made and he was saying, 'Go! Go! Kill 'em.'

Seven

THE MODERN MAN

When Brett arrived at work the following Monday morning *their* arrival (as Tash termed it to herself) got even more attention than usual. She swept in the doors and waved cheerily at the receptionists. She made a point of giving them very friendly waves like Brett would but from a distance because Rachel, the younger one, was so deeply in love with Brett that Tash found her rapt gaze unnerving, especially first thing in the morning.

However this morning, instead of giving Tash her usual I-adore-the-ground-you-walk-on-and-I-would-follow-you-to-the-ends-of-the-universe look, Rachel gave a quick clearly conspiratorial glance at Lesley, the other receptionist, and then they both smiled at Tash very coyly.

'What does that all mean?' wondered Tash to herself and ran through the options. Somebody's birthday? Not that she knew of. April Fool's Day? No, that was weeks away. Secretaries' Day? No, surely that was in March. She shrugged and kept on walking.

However when she arrived in Brett's office, Vanessa, the P.A., also smiled coyly at her.

'What's going on?' Tash asked as she put down their briefcase on their desk. 'Have I got odd socks on or something?' As she was speaking, she glanced down to check, which Vanessa the P.A. noted and would report around the building later on.

Everyone at the T.V. station — well everyone except people like Rob and the studio technicians who never actually noticed anything about anybody unless it was actually happening on camera before them — had noticed that Brett was not looking himself these days. The very slight decline in his appearance which Davis, the producer, had observed on Tash's first morning had accelerated rapidly. Vanessa had already thought to herself that you would describe Brett this morning as rumpled. And it wasn't rumpled in the way you'd expect Brett Flinders to be rumpled which was at the cutting edge of rumpled. The sort of rumpled which you can only get with exactly the right components: English wool, Italian tailoring, French detailing, American merchandising. In fact — Vanessa had never imagined herself thinking this of Brett — he looked crumpled not rumpled. Her heart swelled in sympathy.

Brett, who would have been depressed by Tash's failure to maintain his image, was also unaware that

this decline in his appearance had increased his popularity hugely amongst the female staff at the station. Everyone had heard about the scene between him and Tash at the party on Valentine's night, and while the pair were said to be back together, the general view was that the relationship was rocky. And everyone had noticed that Brett was not himself. For the first time ever, he had really fluffed the taping of his show the other afternoon. He was preoccupied in a way that nobody had ever seen before and he had committed a few major fashion blunders. Over coffee cups, at photocopiers, in lifts all over the building, the T.V. station's female staff were saying to each other that Brett was obviously really suffering because of his relationship with that nasty woman Tash.

As all the female staff thought that Brett was just a megaflirt, they were all surprised — and thrilled — by this discovery. Underneath that easy charm and cheeky style, the guy had a heart. In the last week, four more female staff had fallen seriously in love with Brett Flinders.

As Tash glanced back up from inspecting their socks, she saw that Vanessa was holding up a copy of the new *TV Week* on the cover of which was a large photo of Brett. He (she), Tash noted, was looking handsome and very serious, wearing his glasses and reading a copy of *New Scientist*.

Tash thought it was one of the nicest photographs of Brett she'd ever seen.

'Davis is going off his head about it,' said Vanessa, grinning. 'But I think it's cute.'

'It is cute,' said Tash. She turned over to the story itself and looked at it with satisfaction. 'Why shouldn't brains be sexy?'

Vanessa had scarcely recovered from her surprise at this remark when Tash added, 'I'm making some tea. Would you like a cup?'

Vanessa nodded, stunned, as Tash left the room. Then she picked up her mobile to begin relaying the news of these latest surprising events to eager listeners throughout the station. However, she had only got through to one department when Brett's phone began ringing and she had to answer it.

When she got back to her own call, she had another interesting titbit to add to the station's gossip network. Tash Trevellyn, Brett's girlfriend, had just called and left a message for Brett to ring her pronto. It seemed to Vanessa that their on-again, off-again romance might really be off this time because Tash Trevellyn had sounded mega mega pissed off.

' "Serious Brett",' recited Brett, reading the *TV Week* headline in a fierce whisper, ' "is a Modern Man".'

'Is modern man,' corrected Tash. 'No "a". It's

ungrammatical, but I think they mean that you stand for a whole generation.' She had returned his call and he'd started on about the article without even an hello.

'Reading glasses!' he exploded before she could continue. She knew he was never photographed wearing his reading glasses. It was no mistake on her part, he thought. It was deliberate, wreckless sabotage.

The article itself was OK. Brett Flinders' director, his producer, all his colleagues and, needless to add, his T.V. station's publicity department, had all said what a great guy he was: how funny, how hard-working, how laid-back, how professional, how unaffected by fame, how fond of sport and how appreciative of women with minds of their own (Brett winced at that). But who cares about words? *TV Week*'s readers did not buy it for the story, they bought it for the pictures. Except for one old photo of him playing basketball (his hair looked good, he noted with relief) all of the photos were of him reading and writing. What was he supposed to be doing? Angling for the lead in the sequel to *Dead Poets' Society*?

'Reading glasses!' he exclaimed again. 'What are you doing?'

She was just about to explain how the photos had come about and then she thought again. Why should

she apologise for an accident? She remembered how blasé he'd been about her scientific reputation.

'You should be grateful,' she said. 'At least I made you look like a person of some credibility instead of the male equivalent of a barrel girl.'

'Fine,' he said, 'just remember, you started this.'

'Since we're speaking,' she got in before he could hang up the phone, 'I may as well tell you we're going to have to see each other — there's a dinner party for Laetitia's birthday on Thursday at my place — your place.'

'What?'

'You remember, I promised her months ago. I'll organise the food.'

Brett hung up, his mood grim. On the computer screen before him was Tash's tile of her logged stories and her ideas for future articles. After fuming uselessly for a few minutes about the *TV Week* story, Brett started to flick through it in a desultory way but found it hard to concentrate. How many times a day was it that men on average were supposed to think about sex? Brett was beginning to think that he must be exceeding the normal bandwidth by a few hundred points. First there were his memories of the women's change room at the gym on Saturday (including vivid recollections of Laetitia's breasts) and then, this morning, as he was innocently combing his — Tash's

— hair in the women's toilets, that pretty little blonde from the real estate section came running in to inspect a run in her pantyhose which went from her ankle to her upper thigh.

'$11.95! They aren't worth it, are they?' she said indignantly to Brett, catching his eye in the mirror. He nodded but he entirely disagreed. He would have paid double quite happily. And when he'd recovered from that little incident, he could start looking forward to his next visit to the women's change room. He flicked on to Tash's next story idea and looked at it wearily. The name, Dr Kamins, rang a bell somewhere, dimly. He shrugged and moved on. What these stories needed was some sex appeal. This made him think. He began to grin mischievously.

A short time later he got up and went over and placed himself in front of Harrison's desk. Harrison looked up.

'I have an idea.'

Harrison's face took on a haunted expression.

'For a story.'

Harrison sighed.

'It's about the science of sex.'

Harrison looked surprised and then his face took on an expression which Brett (and Tash, for that matter) had never seen on it before. He looked interested.

'It's information,' said Tash to herself, 'it's just information.' She knew about information, how to handle it, how to absorb it, how to connect new information into information you already had. It wasn't mysterious. Even people who appeared to know everything there was to know about a subject had once upon a time, sometimes not so long ago, known nothing about it at all. She was reminding herself of all this as she sat at Brett's desk with his computer and a stack of music magazines and reports open before her. She opened the first magazine determinedly and turned the computer on.

'I can do this job,' she said to herself. The computer screen was suddenly filled with the image of a dancing naked woman. Tash rolled her eyes.

OK, now Pearl Jam — who are they again? she thought. Her scientifically trained mind was used to thinking in terms of categories containing elements with certain essential characteristics. She had never ever before identified a gas, object or living creature in terms of its being a 'groove/grunge hybrid' but this was a new field of knowledge and what she was really interested in was how this groove/grunge hybrid had rated when they were featured on Brett's music/talk show. She would find out what 'groove' and 'grunge' meant as she progressed.

She entered all the information and moved on to

the next band, the Lemonheads. At that point Vanessa, her P.A., came in bearing more magazines and a pile of files. Vanessa looked at her curiously. She had never seen Brett researching in this earnest, thorough way.

'Here's those other ratings reports you wanted.'

'Thanks, Vanessa,' said Tash, preoccupied with the Lemonheads. 'Oh,' she added remembering, 'how's your mother feeling? Is she better?'

Vanessa looked at her in pleased surprise. Her mother's cat had been run over and she was feeling depressed. She recalled Brett being around when she'd mentioned it to one of the other P.A.s but had not expected him to remember.

'Yeah — thanks,' she said, smiling.

At the *Australian* office, Brett felt his career was flourishing. Marx turned out to be very helpful and more or less wrote the story while Brett sat with him lavishly praising every idea that Marx came up with. As Marx explained to Brett, he really loved working on stories that people enjoyed reading. Brett was thinking that this ruled out a good 90 per cent of the stories published in the paper when Marx leant forward and said confidingly, 'People like reading about sex you know.'

'I do know,' thought Brett. But before he could

say anything further Marx was peering forward at his computer screen, tapping in different ideas for the title.

' "The Science of Sex"? No ... "The Who's Who of Hormones"? No ... "The Yearning Curve"!'

'Mate,' said Brett (he did not think about the fact that Tash never went around at work addressing people as Mate, Pal, Sweetheart and Babe), 'you're a genius.'

The next morning Tash lay on her stomach reading the paper while Brett's masseuse worked on her back. Brett's article was on page two with the sort of headline and placement Tash had only ever dreamed about.

'Superficial,' she said to herself, 'sensationalist.'

And on page two! And people would read it whereas she suspected that they often intended to read her articles but just never got around to it ... after they'd fed the cat, put the garbage out, returned the overdue videos etc., etc. But somehow the issue containing her story got added to the newspapers being put out for recycling and that ended up being that. She sighed. The masseuse was displeased by hearing that sigh and redoubled her efforts. Tash gave up and relaxed, as her spine began to feel longer and her muscles smooth and loose.

BRETT

I really enjoyed the success of my article about the science of sex and smiled proudly when people congratulated me. It was also a pleasure to see Marx beaming to himself as he sat at his computer cutting other people's work to shreds. And Harrison, too, looked almost happy for about ten minutes.

But even while I was going around feeling like Lois Lane and Clark Kent combined I was also aware that I was focusing on this one thing because the rest of my life was, well, dreary. There were all these things I had to adapt to in my new life as Tash and, to be frank, that woman's life left a lot of room for improvement.

For example: clothes. I like clothes. I enjoy clothes. I buy lots of clothes. Sometimes I make mistakes but mostly I don't. I look after my clothes and I match fabrics and styles so that outfits work. I don't judge people on their clothes (or I wouldn't have ever gotten together with Tash or become friends with Rob and Paul) but if Tash or Rob or Paul turn up looking groovily dressed, which happens on occasion (and mostly by accident), then I find myself enjoying seeing them even more.

Actually it's wrong to say that Tash dressed well by accident. At least the accident wasn't hers. The accident was that the right dress (like the black one

she was wearing the first night we met) happened to be in the shop when she went in to buy a dress. Standing in front of the small clothes rack holding Tash's complete wardrobe (and yearning for my own walk-in wardrobe containing heaps of clothes) I could visualise exactly how she had come to buy each item.

At the end of Friday afternoon in her office she'd be reviewing her diary for the coming week and she'd think, 'I'm going to address that journalism conference next week. I need a new suit that looks professional so people will take me seriously.' So off she'd go and buy a serious suit. Or a pair of jeans to go camping. Or a new white shirt because the old white shirt was wearing out. It was all functional purchasing. And as I've said if the shop-of-choice happened to have a groovy pair of jeans or a fantastic white shirt then she bought it, but if they didn't she would buy a dull, serious suit or merely serviceable jeans or a boring white shirt. She never bought anything because it suited her, or on impulse, or because it was on sale and a really good buy as well as being flattering and would really brighten up some dull serious outfit.

As a result it wasn't long before I'd worn my way through the few decent clothes she had and was down to the dregs.

If I ever turn into a woman again, I thought, I'm

going to turn into someone like Laetitia. Great wardrobe and — of course — great body. Not that I've any real complaints about my present accommodation —

I came to a halt then. As I was thinking I'd happened to glance at my — Tash's — body in the mirror and noticed that my — Tash's — skirt was fitting very snugly. I was sure that it used to *hang* more when I first started wearing it and I began to worry: was I putting on weight? I thought of the hamburger and chips I'd eaten the previous night and of the salads and grilled fish that Tash would eat while I'd be hoeing into double-cheese pizzas with chunky fries on the side. Things were catching up with me.

And then there were alluring glimpses of the life I was missing out on. *My* life in other words. Leaving the gym one morning with Laetitia I saw Tash playing basketball with the guys. She'd obviously learnt now how to manage her strength and how to mix it with the boys. She looked as relaxed and cheerfully rowdy as any of them. I sighed and couldn't help gazing longingly. Visits to the women's change rooms were still a satisfactory experience but I was finding it increasingly hard to keep a straight face during the Afro-aerobics class. If these women were so keen to simulate the thrill of the chase, the pleasures of conflict, the sheer delight of letting emotions

overwhelm civilised behaviour, why the hell didn't they just go out and play a rowdy game of ball for sixty minutes? And if they really feel so primal about sex, all that whooping and thrusting, why don't they just do an hour of that instead?

And then there was the morning of Laetitia's birthday dinner. I was running late for work but really needed to eat and I dropped into my regular café. It's one of those joints where you can order anything as long as it's between Turkish bread, but they make great coffee. I sat at my usual table, and then tried to indicate to the staff that I wanted to be served. I didn't have much luck. It was like I was invisible. I could have had a coronary in the corner and no one would have noticed.

Then I saw Tash come in. Within three seconds she had not one, but two waitresses hovering over her. And to add insult to injury, two stacked little kittens appeared from nowhere carrying copies of *TV Week* for her to autograph. There was a little buzz at the tables as other people recognised her. I had stood up to say hello, but I sat back down again not wanting people to think that I was some fan. I needn't have worried. No one noticed me. I hid behind my paper, sulking, until she left, and did not have any breakfast at all.

And then there was Laetitia's birthday dinner

urself. As she'd said she would, Tash organised the food. But I discovered when I arrived that 'organise' clearly meant different things to each of us. To me it meant that the food would have come from wherever food comes from and would be ready to go onto people's plates. I saw my role as appearing from the kitchen bearing something on a tray which would then be placed on the table so everyone could help themselves.

To Tash 'organise' meant that she had selected the recipe, bought the ingredients and had now laid it all out for me on the bench in the kitchen. Raw.

I was still taking all this in when the others arrived: Paul and Christina, Laetitia and Rob. They all crowded into the kitchen, laughing and talking at once. Since their engagement, Paul and Christina had become more fun to be with. They were both nice people. The trouble was that after you'd said they were nice, there was this conspicuous pause while you tried to think of something else to say about them until finally you remembered their real estate and could say how fabulous Paul's apartment was and how Christina's cottage in the mountains was great for weekends.

Anyway even Laetitia, who wasn't given to praising people, observed one morning at the gym that Paul and Christina had revived her faith in romance.

'What's happened,' she said, 'is that two dull people have gotten together and produced half a mildly amusing person.'

'Perhaps Christina's started having multiple orgasms,' I said giving her a sideways look. (I was joking but I was also hopeful of making some progress on the multiple orgasm issue.)

Laetitia, however, burst out laughing and said, 'I'm relieved to see you're getting back to your old self.'

It was the first remark she'd made that showed she had noticed anything different about me. And I realised that I was wrong when I thought she was open and frank with Tash. She was certainly open and frank some of the time but she noticed more than she said and often kept her thoughts to herself.

'Into the lounge room,' Tash was saying to the others, taking bottles from the fridge. Paul picked up the tray of glasses and Tash shepherded them out. I was just about to follow when she threw me a glance that pinioned me to the bench with the still-to-be-cooked dinner.

'I'll be back in a minute,' she said.

As I was standing there alone staring at the neatly arrayed ingredients: chicken pieces, herbs, mushrooms, bacon and rice, I could hear the sound of corks popping and laughter and voices in the lounge room.

She returned five long minutes later.

'Look,' she explained, picking up a recipe book from a shelf at the edge of the bench, 'I'm up to here. You just have to brown the chicken pieces. I've done the garlic and onion and prepared the sauce. Then follow the rest of the recipe. It's easy.'

'Do you want to give me a hand?' I asked in a surly tone, thinking, Well, whose party is this?

'What, Brett Flinders, Mr Take-Away King, cook something?' She took an apron off a hook and put it on me. 'I wouldn't want to ruin your reputation. But we'd better eat something soon or we'll all be smashed.'

It all looked a lot easier in the recipe than it turned out to be in real life. The instructions were almost impressive in their lack of precision. Brown the chicken. How brown? A light brown? A medium brown? A 1960s surfer-type brown? Add the onions. Yes, but were they meant to sit on *top* of the chicken pieces or were they meant to sit in the sauce *between* the chicken pieces? As I was pondering these questions I could hear more corks popping in the lounge room. No one thought that I might be thirsty. The talking and the laughing seemed to be growing louder. I was trying to work out what the instructions: 'Heat the sauce and stir until it reduces to a thick gravy' might mean in practice when Rob's voice said from the door,

'Brett's not being much help, eh? Can I give you a hand?'

I gave him a sort of look the guys defending the fort used to give the cavalry in the T.V. shows when I was a kid, which might, on reflection, have helped explain what happened afterwards. I handed him the parsley and the knife and he started chopping it up very carefully while I stirred the bubbling liquid in the pan and wondered if it was a thick gravy yet or not. No, it had to reduce first, I remembered. I thought reducing was something that girls did on diets.

I was beginning to feel hot from the stove and from all the anxiety of worrying whether things were brown enough, soft enough, cooked enough or thick enough, when I noticed that Rob seemed to be standing quite close to me. He was looking at me. I glanced at him. His eyes were bright and he looked a bit flushed and excited from the champagne. He saw my glance.

'He doesn't realise how lucky he is,' he said, his eyes meeting mine. 'I know how lucky he is.'

I realised three things simultaneously: (a) he was a bit pissed, (b) he was talking about me (Brett) and (c) he was coming on to me (Tash).

I said to him in astonishment, 'I thought you told Brett I wasn't right for him.'

He looked taken aback and very embarrassed.

'Did he tell you that? He shouldn't have done that. When I said that, I guess ... I didn't tell him what I really thought. I meant *he* wasn't right for *you*.'

He was standing right up close to me now, looking into my eyes. 'I think you're terrific, Tash. I've always thought you were terrific.'

I swallowed. He was gazing intently at me clearly expecting some response. I still had hold of the spoon I'd been stirring with. I glanced down at it in my surprise and saw that the liquid I'd been working on for so long had finally gone thick.

'Dinner is ready,' I yelled.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the food which had less to do with my newly acquired cooking skills than with the fact that everyone but me (I still hadn't had a drink) was already half-smashed. But they were high, in a good mood. Laetitia was teasing Paul and Christina about how their relationship had started.

'So let me get this straight,' she said sitting back in her chair and eyeing them, 'you were platonic flatmates and then one day, Paul, you just said, "Christina, you owe me forty dollars for the gas bill, and by the way, I want to jump your bones." '

Paul and Christina looked at each other and laughed but Tash said, 'Laetitia!'

'It was the moon,' Paul and Christina said together.

Laetitia grinned around at the rest of the table. 'Well, at least, they've got their story straight even if it doesn't sound very believable.' She went on, 'I bet you two were rubbing uglies for years, and you just never told us.'

'I can't believe you said that,' exclaimed Tash.

I saw a flicker of — something — cross Laetitia's face and she gave me a sudden glance. I knew immediately what was up. Tash was responding to Laetitia's naughtiness in the way she sometimes did which was to try and tone Laetitia down. And she'd forgotten where she was or, to be more precise, *who* she was.

In short, she was stuffing up her lines. Bells were sounding in Laetitia's brain because she was hearing Brett say the sorts of things that Tash usually said. I guessed that this was only going to make Laetitia be more indiscreet. She'd been wondering what was up with Brett that he'd gotten so goody-goody all of a sudden and it would provoke her to further misbehaviour. Next she would start up on multiple orgasms, but I decided that someone else could worry about that. I had enough problems of my own.

I was conscious of Rob giving me significant looks every few minutes and, in trying to avoid his

gaze, I kept my eyes lowered upon my 1960s surfer-brown piece of chicken.

But I was too agitated to start eating. I kept thinking over that short scene in the kitchen and saying to myself, 'Rob likes Tash. I can't believe it. He never wanted to talk about her and I thought that meant he didn't like her. But actually it meant the opposite. He thinks she's terrific. He's always thought she was terrific.'

I looked across at him and he gazed back with the same sort of look that Rachel, the receptionist at the T.V. station, gave me every time she saw me.

I looked away uncomfortable and then became even more uncomfortable because now Paul put his hand on my arm. Another one! But he wasn't coming on to me. Raising his glass he proposed a toast, 'A toast to the hostess. This meal is fantastic.'

They all said, 'To Tash,' and, raising their glasses (including Tash although I thought she looked a bit pissed off) they all beamed at me. Very affectionately.

They all love her, I thought. They all think she's terrific. But what about me? *I'm* the popular one. *I'm* the funny one.

I looked across the table at her. I could still see her, inside my body. There was a look in her eyes — in my eyes — that was so distinctly Tash that surely the others who all knew her well should be able to sense

something. But even Laetitia, who I was sure for a moment had sensed something, had relaxed, and was laughing at whatever Tash was saying. She was in a good mood tonight, I noticed, laughing, full of jokes. They were talking about the wedding. Christina was saying, 'Maybe I should throw the bouquet to you, Brett?'

'God, no,' Tash snorted. 'You'd better throw it straight to Laetitia or we'll all get crushed in the rush.'

She really is fantastic tonight, I thought to myself as I watched Tash. And they're laughing at her. They think she's funny. Maybe she's funny because she's me now.

'Skip the flowers,' retorted Laetitia cheerfully pouring herself more champagne, 'throw me the best man ... '

Who did that make me?

I got up suddenly.

'Excuse me,' I said.

There was just the reading light on in Tash's bedroom. A small glow in the corner, casting soft shadows. I sat down in front of the dressing table and looked in the mirror, wondering if Tash could see me in her body like I could see her in mine. She was the only one who *knew* after all. I realised that I'd been sitting there at the table not just thinking that someone might guess the truth, but hoping they

would. And let's face it, how many dinners have you been to where you've come home afterwards and said, 'I knew something was wrong from the minute I arrived and then just as I was finishing my chicken, I realised — they've swapped bodies. Tash is in Brett's body and Brett's in hers. Once I understood that, the rest of the evening was fine.'

'You're losing it,' I said to the face in the mirror. 'Stay calm. I'm me. I'm Brett.'

I said the last word to myself like a proclamation. 'I'm Brett, OK, I'm Brett, BRETT.'

'There's something different about you, Tash.' Christina had come quietly into the room without me noticing. I swung around to face her, startled and embarrassed. But she was standing there, smiling at me. In the dim lamplight, she looked quite lovely. Golden hair, bright, pale delicate face looking pretty and gentle. Laetitia said she was a wan fairy but tonight she was shining like the Good Witch of the North.

'You're not pregnant, are you?' she said excitedly.

'The only thing,' I said to myself, 'the only thing that *hasn't* happened.' I got myself together in time to say, 'No', in a neutral tone.

'Oh, well,' she said, 'one day.'

She came up and stood beside me at the mirror and smiled at me as she fixed her hair.

'You know,' she said, 'there must have been something in the air that Valentine's Day night. You met Brett. Paul and I fell in love. Now we're getting married. Maybe you'll be next.'

'I don't think Brett's the marrying kind,' I said.

I was trying to sound light, flippant, but she had come into the room determined to tell me, Tash, something and she was going to say it.

'If Brett isn't going to get there, Tash, don't you miss out. Find someone who appreciates you. It's too important.'

She smiled and returned to the lounge room, leaving me in the bedroom contemplating her ... ls. Alone. It had been one of those touching mor ... in women's friendships and it made me sick.

Tash stayed with me drying up after ... ers had gone. As we were passing and stackin ... ur hands accidentally to... ... he noticed, she didn't l... ...me.

I felt uneasy, stirred up with the em ... ns ... e night and the conversation with Ch ... na, ... d wanting to say something to Tash but no ... e ... ... When I turned to speak to her though, she ... hanging up her tea towel and reaching for her coat

'You're going too?'

I hadn't expected this. I hadn't imagined her walking in and walking out again as if this wasn't her

place, as if she didn't live here.

'Yeah — it's pretty late,' she said, putting on her jacket. 'Thanks for all your help. You were great.'

I try to think of a reason to stop her leaving. 'Think you'll be able to get a taxi?'

'Sure, should be OK.' She kissed me lightly on the cheek. 'Bye.'

I followed her to the door, let her out, watched her walk to the stairs, heard the latch on the front security door click closed in the quiet night, and then turned towards the flat. After all the noise and laughter, it seemed still and empty. I went into the dining room to turn off the light. The only movement was Tash's old-fashioned wall clock. Its hands were ticking the time with stiff arthritic jerks.

In the evening after work, I didn't go back to Tash's place but went to my own apartment. Tash wasn't in. I remembered that she would be late — they'd be taping the show that afternoon. I didn't have a key anymore. I sat on the steps to wait for her.

She got home just after dark. Rob dropped her off and I could tell immediately that the taping had gone well. She was on a post-show high, laughing as she got out of the car and then leaning on the door to say something to Rob. She looked happy. Neither of them noticed me. When she finally shut the door, Rob

gave his horn a blast, and drove off.

Tash turned towards the house and saw me.

I smiled at her. 'Feel like a walk?'

Hyde Park, a few blocks west, was the nearest open space to my apartment. At this time of the evening the last of the city workers had made their way home through the park and the first of the night's drunks and druggies hadn't arrived. There were just a few couples, strolling along like Tash and me, and we had the whole green cathedral of fairy lights to ourselves.

We walked down the central avenue. The moon was glimmering above us, through the massed branches of the trees.

'Tash, we have to think about the future,' I said.

'I know. Davis thinks we should find out any day now about the New York job. If you get it, what'll we do? I mean I know it'd be me going for the moment, but it's a chance for you. And you never know when we might change back.'

I turned and looked at her.

'I'm talking about something more important than that.'

I took her hand, closed my fingers about it firmly and said, 'I've realised I didn't do the right thing by you, before. I'd like to give us another chance.'

Her eyes as she gazed at me seemed brighter and

and I realised they were full of tears.

You know — we could try. I'd like to do it properly — living together, everything — if you want.'

'Oh, Brett.' Her eyes were shining at me now. 'Do you really mean it?'

'I guess I've been seeing things differently lately.'

She smiled and looked at our clasped hands, 'I think I never believed I'd hear you say that.'

I breathed a sigh of relief and touched her cheek lightly.

'Look at the way we are. Who else can there be for us? What am I going to do, pick up guys? We may stay this way forever.'

The moment I'd spoken I knew I'd made a mistake. I felt her stiffen, heard or felt an intake of breath. She spoke calmly and quietly.

'I see. You haven't really changed your mind. You're just afraid of having no one.'

'No, that's not it — ' I said.

She took her hands away from mine.

'That's how it sounds.'

'I'm just being realistic. I'm talking about us being together. I thought that was what you wanted.'

'Not like this.' She faced me, her mouth hardened, her hands in her pockets. My hands in my pockets. Jesus, I thought in irritation, she's got my body, my job, my life and now I'm offering her all she

ever wanted: a permanent committed relationship. What else does she want, a free set of steak knives?

'Hang on,' I said incredulously. 'This is the scene where I do what you want, and you get happy. You've always wanted me to commit myself. Now I'm doing it.'

'If it had come three weeks earlier, it would have meant a lot more.'

I was getting angry. 'Oh, right, not only do I have to be what you want, I have to be it *when* you want it too.'

'You've just had a taste of what it's like to be on the receiving end,' she said, 'and you're scared you're going to get stuck that way.'

She was looking at me, all fired up. I knew what was coming, the big Tash speech. I looked away and waited for it.

'It might come as a surprise to you, Brett,' she began, 'but the idea of being your last resort is not exactly my romantic dream. You've made it very clear over the past few weeks that being me is the worst thing that could have happened to you, and that you think your life is over. I don't feel like that. I'm not overjoyed about being you either, but I'm going to make the best of it. I've decided now, I'm going to go for that job. And if they give it to me — I'm going to New York.'

I thought of saying, 'Tash, be reasonable, I know you're hurt and my timing's lousy but think about the future. It's not easy maintaining this masquerade. There's lots we don't know about each other's lives and we are the only ones who can understand what the other person is going through. Don't con yourself that you can put it over Davis all the time. He's a clever ruthless man. Tash, whatever the cosmic forces were trying to achieve by this exercise, one thing is apparent, we need each other.' But would I convince her? I had a feeling she'd look at me and merely say, 'You mean *you* need me.'

'I give up,' I said, 'I can't win with you.'

She could work it out for herself.

'What if we changed back?' she asked. 'Would you still feel the same way then?'

I looked at her bitterly.

'I guess we may never know.'

She turned and walked away.

I sat staring out at the dark trees and the fountain and the fairy lights for a time and then got up and walked back to her flat.

As I rounded the corner I saw a huddled figure sitting on the doorstep outside the front security door. For a second my heart lifted and I thought, 'Tash,' then I recognised the wavy red hair and this figure was distinctly female. As I approached her, Laetitia raised

her face. It was pale and blotchy in the street light. Her eyes were red. She was sniffing.

'Oh-oh,' I thought, 'somebody's broken a nail.'

'What's wrong?' I sighed.

It was the wrong question. Still huddled there on the step, she burst into tears, sobbing like Anna Magnani, the Italian actress, in full flight. I haven't got the energy to deal with other people's problems, I thought, but I dragged myself up the steps and sat down next to her, feeling awkward.

'What's wrong with me?' she said in a muffled voice. 'Why does it never work out?'

'There's nothing wrong with you,' I said trying to sound convincing.

'There must be,' she sobbed, 'it always happens to me.'

I knew I couldn't ask her what had gone wrong. Obviously Tash knew about this failed romance. Clearly something had happened between last night at her birthday dinner when she'd been sparkling and tonight when she was here crying her mascara off. I put my arm gingerly around her.

'Hey come on,' I said. 'Hey there ... ' I wondered who the guy was, where he was now. He must have some sense of how much he had upset her, I thought. 'Bastard,' I said to myself. 'Bastards,' I added aloud, thinking of Tash.

'Bastards,' said Laetitia. I patted her on the back. She went on crying.

I feel like a man, I thought that Monday morning as I woke. I kept my eyes closed. I am a man. I feel like a man. I held my hands up. I opened my eyes. They were Tash's hands. I was trapped.

I got up and stared at my female body and then I looked in the mirror. After a moment I undid a couple of buttons at the neck of Tash's neat, white unobtrusive blouse. Ms Tash Trevellyn no longer looked quite so buttoned up. I undid a couple more and flattened out the neck of the blouse so the collar sat flat. Ms Tash Trevellyn looked almost laid-back. I pulled the blouse back at the sides and folded it and tucked it in again at the waist so that it was tight across the body. I rolled the skirt up at the waist so it was well above the knees. I stood there staring at the mirror, hands on hips. Ms Tash Trevellyn suddenly had attitude.

I saw what needed to be done. 'It's a dog-eat-dog world out there,' I said to myself.

Eight

NUPTIAL DISASTER

Laetitia, I need some help.' 'Don't we all,' thought Laetitia who'd recovered from her outburst and was now just in surviving mode, neither up nor down, just getting through the day. She assumed Tash was still miserable about Brett and was thinking of seeing a counsellor.

Tash, however, said, 'I need some clothes. I have nothing to wear to Paul and Christina's wedding. I have nothing to wear, full stop. You have to help me.'

'What do you want in particular?' asked Laetitia. Tash always wanted something in particular. She never went out just to buy clothes.

'The works. Everything except functional, I've got functional. I'm perfectly outfitted for every occasion I wouldn't want to attend.' This was a summary judgment of Tash's wardrobe Laetitia couldn't argue with. But she was very surprised to hear Tash herself saying it.

Probably, she thought, Tash didn't really want any clothes but was proposing this shopping expedition to divert Laetitia, thinking that she needed

go out and spend money, even if only by proxy, as a way of cheering her up. Retail therapy.

However, Tash was saying, 'The sort of thing I've got in mind is like the jersey dress on page eighty of your last issue ... '

Laetitia had almost a photographic memory for clothes. Her joke was that if the police ever wanted her to provide a description of a suspect, it would start something like: 'grey wool skirt, two inches above the knee with back kick pleat and trim on left side pocket ... ' She knew the dress on page eighty. It was a Clohesy, cut on the bias, draped very close to the body, slightly scooped neck, simple, classic, but a bit *mild* for Laetitia's taste. As if she was reading her mind, Tash added, 'But more flash and more flesh.'

'Flash and — flesh,' repeated Laetitia. Was there something wrong with her mobile? Could she have gotten radio waves crossed with some other conversation and now be talking to some unknown woman. Flesh and flash — Tash?

'That's right,' said Brett, clear about what he wanted. He had told the newspaper he needed to go and do some research and that was exactly what he'd done. He had spent the morning leafing through women's magazines trying to get ideas for his — *not* Tash's — his new wardrobe. The next step was to get Laetitia's help.

'Well,' said Laetitia to herself, 'for years you've been wanting to take Tash out to a shop and get her some proper clothes and do her up. Here's your chance.'

'It's not enough just to buy the dress,' she said, 'you have to do the full makeover — hair to toes.'

'I'm game.'

'You are!' thought Laetitia. 'Bring your credit cards — all your credit cards — and meet me here at — ' Laetitia consulted her own diary — 'two o'clock tomorrow. Come here to my office.'

She expected Tash to say oh, but I've got to go to the opening of a new observatory tomorrow, or there's this really interesting lecture I want to attend on shale foundations in the Sydney basin. But Tash didn't say either of these things. She said, 'Tomorrow. Two o'clock. Your office. You're on.'

Laetitia put her phone down and thought, 'She really must have given Brett his marching orders.'

Quite often since her birthday she had remembered there'd been something strange about both Brett and Tash that night. Brett, for the first time ever in her experience, had seemed taken aback by some of her naughtiness, several times exclaiming, 'I can't believe you said that.' While Tash — well, Laetitia, despite the amount she'd had to drink, remembered very clearly one brief incident right near

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the end of the evening.

The others were talking. She and Tash were sitting side by side just listening and she'd murmured to Tash, 'Oh god, it's my birthday night — and I'm feeling frisky.'

'Red alert!' Tash responded dryly but with a grin. Laetitia looked around the men at the table. Brett was clearly out of the question in view of his relationship, or ex-relationship, with Tash. Rob could not be wasted on a one-night stand in case she needed to marry him when she was thirty-five. That left Paul.

'D'you think Paul? One last fling before a lifetime of fidelity?'

Instead of looking shocked as she'd expected, Tash had definitely looked amused which inspired Laetitia.

'I'm sure I could teach him a thing or two — it could be a sort of wedding present for Christina.'

Tash had grinned and, leaning closer, said, 'I don't think Christina needs your customised wedding present. I've just been having a one-on-one with her girl-to-girl in the bedroom, and she says Paul's giving her more multiple orgasms now than she can handle.'

Laetitia thought for a moment.

'That wouldn't be very many,' she observed.

Tash, instead of looking shocked at this prime example of her bitchiness, had said, 'My thoughts

exactly.' And given Laetitia a sideways grin.

It was the baddest conversation she'd ever had with Tash. It was as if, in her year with Brett, she'd picked up some of his cheek.

'Well, right on sister,' thought Laetitia, 'I'll get you a new wardrobe to match your new style.'

In the days before their wedding Paul and Christina's friends were astonished to discover that the event was going to be a star turn. Laetitia was the first to find out. On the morning of her projected shopping expedition with Tash, Serena Antony and Gilead Beacham swept into her office. Serena and Gilead were, respectively, the social columnist and the social column photographer for the magazine. They were known to less respectful members of staff, like Laetitia, as Ant and Bee. Laetitia noted that they were looking at her in an interested sort of way which made sense as she doubted that they'd ever noticed her existence before although she had once known Serena's brother very well, for about five hours.

'Background,' announced Serena, taking out a Mont Blanc fountain pen ($3235, estimated Laetitia, depending on current exchange rates) and a small notebook with mother-of-pearl cover and gilt edges (Laetitia couldn't identify the brand name and price for this and felt very frustrated). 'Background,'

repeated Serena, 'on the Page–Hollinghurst wedding.' Laetitia was used to the fact that Serena had been so expensively educated that she did not need to speak in sentences like the rest of the population. She understood that Serena was really saying, 'Laetitia, could you please give me the background ... ' However, she was really foxed by the reference to the Page–Hollinghurst wedding until she realised that Serena was talking about Christina Page and Paul Hollinghurst.

'Paul and Christina's wedding is getting covered by *Chic*?' she thought, staring at Ant and Bee as they sat opposite her, perfectly dressed in cream and beige and emitting an air of privilege. She knew that Paul, as a very successful futures trader, must have well-heeled business connections but — still.

'Right-o. Back to you shortly,' said Laetitia, attempting an upper class crispness and starting to phone as her two unexpected visitors left.

As she explained to Tash that afternoon it was not, however, Paul's connections but Christina's that had led them to being considered suitable for coverage in *Chic*. Christina had spent her life being nice to people. Since her first year in pre-school she'd remembered people's birthdays, and when all those people to whom she'd sent birthday cards grew up, they invited her to their weddings. Now she was

getting married, some of those people had repaid her niceness to them by suggesting caterers, musicians, etc. for *her* wedding. One old friend had said she'd put in a good word for Christina to get a special deal with another old friend who now ran Floribunda, the new florist so fashionable that they didn't even have distressed timber arrangements in their windows. They had nothing at all. Very chic.

'Floribunda,' Laetitia explained to Brett as he wriggled in and out of glamorous frocks, 'likes to work with the wedding organiser, Taglioni Brown. So Taglioni Brown agreed to a special price too. And after that it just snowballed. It's like one of those Robert Altman movies where three big stars agree to do cameo roles and after a while every big actor in Hollywood expects to be asked. So Roger St Q is doing the catering; Clohesy's doing the dresses, of course; Cosima is doing everyone's hair. . . so *Chic* thinks it's a big event and feels they ought to cover it.'

Brett remembered he was supposed to be taking an interest in this conversation and asked, 'How come Christina hasn't told us this?'

'Oh, I'm sure,' said Laetitia, 'that she doesn't want us unmarried females to feel left out.'

In view of all the money that had been spent or more correctly, saved, in making Paul and Christina's

The celebrant's voice was taking on a sing-song intonation: 'Paul and Christina, do you vow to care for and cherish each other, sharing your weaknesses and your strengths ... '

'Concentrate,' said Laetitia to herself, 'they're coming to the finale.'

She was aware of Tash beside her looking sad and reached out and squeezed her hand.

"We do,' said Paul and Christina simultaneously. They kissed, their faces radiant. Laetitia glanced at Tash. She was staring at the ground. Across from them, Brett was staring gloomily into space. Rob was, as usual, gazing adoringly at Tash.

The combined talents of Floribunda, Taglioni Brown and Roger St Q were all apparent in the arrangement of the reception. Long tables decked with gardenias and lilies were laid out beneath the trees. There were floating candles in the lake, a perfumed fountain, and a cake made entirely of rose petals and spun sugar. The guests oohed and aahed in delight. Laetitia took one look at it and said to Brett, 'Weddings make me thirsty. Let's get a drink.'

She made a beeline for the bar, Brett right behind her, and in a few minutes they had secured a bottle of French champagne (kept underneath the bar for the bridal party only) from an admiring waiter, and were laughing raucously.

'Look at that dress,' Tash exclaimed indignantly to Rob. She'd been looking at Brett all through the wedding ceremony and feeling furious.

'Mmmm,' said Rob. He had no recollection of having noticed anything else since Tash had arrived. Then he asked, trying to keep the hopeful note out of his voice, 'You guys still not speaking?'

'I'm not going to let it spoil my night,' said Tash firmly. 'I am going to have a good time.'

A waiter was coming by with a tray of glasses. Tash swallowed her drink rapidly and took another.

Laetitia, still scanning the crowd automatically for Desirables, To-Die-Fors and Divorcees, came across a familiar face.

'Look who's here.'

Brett glanced around and realised she meant Colette who was on the arm of a guy he didn't know, but had seen around, Jeff Somebody-or-other. He shrugged his shoulders and went to pour Laetitia another drink. Their bottle was empty.

'Think he'll give us another one?' he asked Laetitia.

'For godsakes, Tash,' she said, 'Will you never learn? Just batt your lashes and gaze into his eyes.'

'Gazing into their eyes I definitely know,' Brett said to himself as he set off towards the waiter, 'but I'll have to work on batting my lashes.'

He was about to give his lashes an experimental batt when he heard his own voice hiss behind him, 'What are you wearing? You make me look like a game show hostess.'

Brett turned and looked coolly at Tash.

'Your image needed a lift.'

'You've lifted it right out of the front of that dress!' she snapped. What on earth was he wearing to make her breasts sit up like that? She supposed it was a Wonderbra.

'I'm not afraid of my sexuality,' Brett answered. 'Laetitia helped me pick it out.'

Tash felt so angry that she found her fingers were clenched around the glass she was holding.

'Stay away from my friend,' she instructed Brett. 'She'd be sick if she knew who you really were.'

'Oh?' thought Brett. He was conscious that lately he'd been acting more and more like himself with Laetitia but contrary to Tash's view, he and Laetitia seemed to be getting on very well nonetheless. He knew better, however, than to suggest this to Tash.

'You're with Rob,' he said defiantly. 'I'll do what I like.'

This was a challenge. He turned and walked away. Tash stood staring after him for a moment and then went and got another drink. She tried to stop herself watching Brett and Laetitia together but was

unable to do so. Laetitia had disliked Brett, certainly disapproved of him. But there she was, her head close to Brett's, the pair of them clearly amused, making jokes, as they watched Serena Antony and Gilead Beacham, the society reporter and photographer from *Chic*, earnestly circulating in search of the sort of prey that justified the presence at this wedding of all the city's hottest names in decorating, catering and design: Floribunda, Taglioni Brown, Roger St Q, Clohesy and Cosima.

The sight of Laetitia and Brett looking so relaxed and happy together gave Tash such a painful feeling of being left out that she found her mind searching for ways to revenge herself on Brett. Then a way presented itself in the shape of a familiar head of bright blonde hair, pretty face, model-perfect figure and legs. Tash raised her glass in greeting to Colette. Colette was delighted.

'Brett, I didn't know you were here!'

Over Colette's shoulder, Tash saw Brett watching her with concern. Revenge, she thought, revenge. She promptly became extremely interested in Colette, 'We haven't talked for a long time — ' she began. She had a sudden sharp memory of Brett and Colette together on the deck of the ferry and Brett confiding in her about the trip to New York.

'A long time,' her brain repeated, reminding her

that that was where she was up to in her sentence. When had *she* and Colette last talked? She didn't have time to wonder.

'In fact,' she improvised, 'I don't think we've ever talked. What have you been doing? How's work? I've always thought modelling must be a fascinating job. Tell me about it.'

Tash was aware as she was making this little speech that if Laetitia could have overhead it, she would have rolled her eyes — 'I've always thought modelling must be a fascinating job'! Puh-leese! Fortunately either Colette's standards weren't so high or she was just thrilled to have Brett showing interest in her. She flicked her hair back to show off her striking new earrings (a gift from Jeff, her date for the night, but quite dispensable) and thought of an amusing anecdote to tell Brett Flinders.

By the time that the long warm evening had turned into night the wedding guests had split into two distinct groups. The smaller and more decorous group was still seated around the be-swathed and flower-laden dining tables, sipping coffee or port. They were mostly older relatives of the bride and groom and when they weren't remarking to each other on how lovely Christina looked, they were discussing the food. Roger St Q had used the occasion to launch his new menu and while the food was good, even his

most enthusiastic fans were forced to describe it as 'adventurous'. The starter was a wattleseed savoury sorbet served with a slightly chilled pinot noir and Laetitia predicted that in future years, Paul and Christina's friends and relatives would be telling their grandchildren about the wedding they went to in the nineties where the meal began with ice cream and red wine.

Laetitia herself was, of course, with the larger and definitely less decorous contingent of the guests. They occupied the space around the bar and jammed the round, raised platform which served as the dance floor. Within a couple of hours they had gone from being less decorous to definitely wild. Laetitia was contributing to this, as she'd come across a quite promising Divorcee who might almost have been (except for the divorce and a certain lack of charisma) a Desirable, and she was dancing with him energetically waiting to see if he'd show more promise when he loosened up a bit.

Tash and Colette were also dancing while Brett watched them from beside the bar. Tash, aware of this, was flirting more and more outrageously with Colette and flicking a glance over her shoulder every so often to see how Brett was taking it. Colette was delighted. Leaning close in against Brett during a slow number, she thought that finally her long campaign

was going to end in success. At the end of the bracket, however, she knew she ought to go and check her make-up. Promoting a sexy, free image was one thing, but the photographer from *Chic* was still around and she didn't want her lipstick to be smudged just yet.

'I'm going to powder my nose,' she said, laying her hand on Tash's. 'Don't go away, will you?'

'I'll be right here,' said Tash.

Brett seized the opportunity. He went over to Tash, 'Will you *stop* coming on to her?'

He was angry and a little bit drunk, but tried to keep his voice down. Tash looked at him, delighted. All the times she'd spent watching women throw themselves at Brett, watching *him* flirt. He wasn't enjoying being the observer now? Poor Brett. She was eager for a fight, she knew they both were.

'Well, well, well, the shoe's on the other foot now, isn't it? He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword and she who laughs last, laughs loudest.'

She grinned at him wickedly and raised her eyebrows. Try your worst, buster.

'And what if she thinks you're serious?'

At this Tash hesitated. She didn't like Colette but she didn't want to hurt her either.

'Have you thought of that?' Brett pushed home his advantage. 'What I did was my responsibility. There's no need to take it out on her.'

His voice was rising. Tash became conscious of people glancing towards them.

'Keep it down.'

He looked at her.

'So, now who's worried about appearances? Maybe this job's going to your head, Tash.'

Tash turned and stormed off through the crowd. Colette, coming up to them, saw what had happened, gave Brett her best angry look, and then hurried off after Tash.

Out in the broad street in front of the house there were cars jammed everywhere on both sides of the street, on the footpath and up the drive. Taxis, ordered to collect departing guests, threaded their way through the parked cars effortlessly and sped away to their destinations, paying no attention to occasional lone drunks like Tash who suddenly hurtled onto the street and started waving their arms. Drunks could walk and sober up as far as the taxi drivers were concerned. Tash gazed after a departing taxi cursing. Then Colette appeared out of the darkness and took her arm.

'Brett, I'll give you a lift.'

Tash tried to shake off her hand. 'No, it's all right Colette, I just want to be alone.'

Another taxi had come by. Tash, unaware that it had picked up another guest further up the street,

waved at it, but the driver ignored her.

'I'll walk,' she said, 'and catch one in a while.'

'You'll never get one this time on a Saturday night,' Colette protested, 'and my car's right here.' She waited, holding her breath, like a cat stalking a bird.

Tash sighed. What choice did she have? She turned and walked reluctantly around to the passenger's seat. Colette's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

Just as she was getting the keys out of her bag, however, a male voice yelled, 'Colette!' It was Jeff, her date for the evening. Colette had to make a quick decision. She, like nature, was not sentimental.

'Piss off, Jeff,' she said.

But Jeff, though hurt, continued to approach. Tash, hazy with alcohol and a muddle of feelings — guilt, resentment, anger, sexual excitement — turned and looked at Jeff rather vaguely. He was a tall man, heavily built and his broad face flushed with drinking. His eyes were narrowed, fixed on Colette but Tash didn't register any of these warning signs.

'I just want to talk to you,' Jeff was saying to Colette emotionally. She dismissed him.

'Just ignore him, Brett.'

'Who's he?'

Jeff's tone was threatening. He took a step towards them. Tash faced him and spoke patiently,

trying to be the voice of reason.

'Look, when a woman tells you she doesn't want to talk to you, it means she doesn't want to talk to you.'

'And when a guy tells me that,' Jeff had sized himself up against Brett and knew he was bigger and stronger, 'it means that he wants to get his head smacked in.'

Tash gazed at him somewhat bemusedly. She had grown up as the only child of an academic couple who practised rational discourse with their daughter from an early age and were opposed to smacking. Tash's last remembered experience of direct physical threat dated back to kindergarten and concerned a teddy bear.

'I don't want to fight you,' she said.

'Bad luck,' said Jeff, grabbing her by the collar.

There was a crack of bone-on-bone as he headbutted her, and Tash slumped, unconscious, to the ground.

Some time later, beside a car further up the street, there was another dispute. But this was more friendly. Brett was trying to get into Tash's car, stabbing at the lock on the driver's side with her keys, and Rob was trying to stop him. Rob had noticed some time before that Tash was getting seriously drunk. He had seen

Brett leave with Colette following. Laetitia was busy dancing with her Divorcee. Tash was dancing too, with this person and that. She seemed animated but not quite as if she registered what she was doing. Rob could see she was going to need someone to take her home. He promptly stopped drinking.

After a time he'd managed to steer her away from the reception and towards her car. As she approached it, she suddenly started to pat the side of her dress and then observed to Rob, 'No pockets, silly dress. Where's the keys?'

'Ah,' she went on, 'in my *handbag*!' Her handbag hung on a long strap from her shoulder. Fumbling a bit she took it off her shoulder and then raised it to eye level and opened it and peered inside as if she'd never seen it before.

'Tash,' Brett announced to Rob, 'is untidy. So untidy she has a gizmo on her keys and whistles for them when she loses them.'

Having said this, she gave a whistle loud enough, Rob thought, to summon fire engines from outlying suburbs.

'Ssh, Tash,' he said urgently, expecting them to be yelled at by the neighbourhood.

'Ssh, yourself,' slurred Brett defiantly. Just then they both heard the keys beeping loudly from inside the handbag.

'There're the keys,' said Brett seizing them and marching around to the driver's door where it was soon apparent he was too drunk to get them into the lock. In the process he dropped them. Brett peered down at the road. Gave quite a musical little whistle. The keys responded. Brett giggled.

'We could have that on the show,' Brett said, 'a band that whistles and keys that answer.' This seemed to strike him as extremely funny because he went into such a fit of giggles that he had to lean against the car.

Rob tried to get the car keys out of Tash's hand and coax her around to the passenger's side. He thought she was in an odd mood. Angry one minute, giggly the next and generally raucous. Still, she'd just broken up with Brett. It had obviously been a big thing for both of them. He remembered, very clearly, that awkward conversation with Brett in the pub.

'I should drive,' Brett said, suddenly aware that he was seated on the passenger's side without really knowing how this had happened.

'No,' said Rob firmly, peering at the rear vision mirrors, adjusting the seat, settling himself into the unfamiliar car.

'Is this not Natasha Trevellyn's car?' asked Brett indignantly.

'It is,' said Rob, playing along to placate him.

'And am I not Natasha Trevellyn?'

'You are.'

Brett suddenly leant over and hit the horn on the steering wheel. 'Wrong!' he announced as if the horn was a buzzer on a T.V. quiz show. The horn echoed loudly in the quiet streets. Rob, surprised, tried to fend Brett off and the car swerved wildly. Brett burst into giggles.

'Wrong! You *think* I'm Natasha Trevellyn and I *look* like Natasha Trevellyn, but I'm *not*!'

Rob glanced at Tash sitting there in her low-cut dress, her hair coming loose, one strap starting to slide off her shoulder.

'Who are you then?' he asked, amused to see her so wild.

She was suddenly very prim, shoulders drawn in together like a petulant child with a secret.

'I'm someone else. I can't tell you who. But you can guess.'

She looked at Rob quite as if he ought to know exactly who she really was.

'I'll give you five seconds,' she offered. Rob opened his mouth to speak.

'Five — four — three — two — one ... Time's up!' She hit the horn again. The car swung about in the street before Rob righted it. He caught his breath, looked at her, and realised with relief they were only a couple of blocks from her place.

By the time they got there however, all her wild energy had fallen away. She said when he went around and opened the door for her, 'I can't get up.'

'Yes, you can,' said Rob, pulling her from the car. Tash, half-giggling, half-asleep, was a dead weight, refusing to put her feet on the ground. Rob part walked, part dragged her up to the apartment. Inside, he steered Tash into the kitchen and propped her up against the wall. This seemed to be a neutral sort of place to leave her. Rob handed her a glass of water and then said sheepishly, 'I'd better go.'

'No. Stay and have a drink!' Brett straightened up of his own accord and went to the cupboard. 'You want coffee?' he asked. He pulled a package of coffee from the cupboard and thrust it into Rob's hands, 'Have some coffee.'

Then he stumbled out of the kitchen. Rob stared after him for a moment then heard a sound. Tash had clearly flopped heavily onto her bed. Rob hesitated, not knowing what to do.

He put on the coffee.

In the bedroom Brett was stretched out, feeling relaxed and happy, feeling euphoric in fact. Rob came in and placed a cup of coffee on the bedside table and then stood, undecided. Finally he sat down on the corner of the bed furthest away from Brett.

'Thanks.'

Brett reached for the cup but his dress was entangled in the suspenders of Tash's black lacy corset which he was wearing. He realised he had done the corset up on the wrong legs at some point (he couldn't remember when) and he now wriggled around on the bed trying to free them.

'Women's clothes,' he observed to Rob, 'are sexy but sort of complicated.'

He eventually got the dress clear of the suspenders but hitched it up in the process, displaying a fair area of thigh and suspenders. Rob was transfixed. He tried to look away, failed, looked back at Brett and then said haltingly, 'Tash ... you know ... Brett's my best friend. There are rules about that sort of thing.'

Brett looked at him drowsily. He was still feeling euphoric and Rob's behaviour was amusing him.

'You don't realise,' he said, smiling at Rob, '*I'm* your best friend.'

Rob stared at him. Tash's lips were smiling at him. Her hair was tousled on the pillow. Her skirt was still alluringly hitched up on one side. Rob couldn't help himself. He threw himself across the bed and started covering Tash's face, neck and shoulders with hot wet kisses.

TASH

...st thing I remembered was a sort of slapping ...e which was my face hitting the bitumen. After ...t things were blurry for a bit, and then I felt a ...arp and stinging pain in my lip.

'Ouch,' I said loudly.

A face framed with blonde hair came slowly into ...ocus above me, and then I realised where I was. In Brett's bedroom, on Brett's bed. Colette was dabbing disinfectant on my face, on my lip. It was excruciating. I could taste blood in my mouth and pointed to it, trying to say the word, not able to speak properly.

'Oh, god,' said Colette, 'poor Brett.'

'Poor Brett,' I thought furiously, the events of the evening coming back to me very clearly. 'He has the affair and *I* get punched.'

I leant back on the pillow. The room was starting to swim, from alcohol, the ache in my head, and from exhaustion. Colette leant closer dabbing some ointment on my cheek. I couldn't keep her face in focus. I closed my eyes. I could smell her perfume. Then I felt her lips on my cheek and on my eyes. Confused, I tried to open my eyes. Then Colette kissed me full on the mouth. That got my eyes open and focused.

'Jesus!' I thought.

I tried to sit up. Colette was sitting on the bed looking at me. It seemed there were a few buttons undone in her top which I was sure had been done up before. There was an expectant glow in her eyes.

'Look — Colette,' I said wearily, thinking it had been the longest day in history, 'please don't take offence, but I can't do this. I can't really explain, but anyway I've had a lot to drink ... '

'That's OK,' she said, 'I understand.'

'You do? That's good,' I was very relieved. I leaned back and closed my eyes and I said, 'It's nothing to do with you, I'm sure you're a nice girl.'

In my daze I thought I heard what sounded like a low giggle, when suddenly an unmistakable sound made me freeze.

The sound of a zipper.

I looked down, and saw that Colette's hands were undoing Brett's belt and trousers at about the same speed those Ninjas used to throw those little star knives on T.V. I felt a mix of horror and confusion; my head swam. Her blonde head was bent down over me.

'No, Colette, please stop ... you don't understand ... '

But Brett's body did. There was a great rushing sound in my ears and next second I was saying, 'Wow!'

Afterwards I went immediately to sleep in the time-honoured male tradition but a couple of hours later, when I stirred and felt a body next to mine I was instantly awake and I lay there, sleepless, until daybreak.

BRETT

'Rob,' I said, getting my lips away from his, 'Rob — stop, no.' The problem was, however, that I couldn't stop laughing for long enough to sound firm.

He gave me another kiss on the cheek and then said in my ear (giving it a few kisses in the process), 'I know it feels weird, but you and Brett have broken up. We're not doing anything wrong.'

He was nuzzling my neck and my ear again. Part of me was thinking, 'Mmm,' the other part was asking, 'What's happening?'

'Rob,' I said quickly before the body I was in got any more interested in what was happening to it, 'you don't understand — this could be dangerous.'

He took my — Tash's — face between his hands and said, seriously (ever the responsible guy) — 'I've got condoms.' Then he kissed me on the mouth again before I could protest any further. I was confused by alcohol and by the signals her body was sending out. I looked up at Rob, who was becoming very blurry, and gave up.

'Basketball will never be the same again,' I thought philosophically.

Six minutes later, it was all over.

'Yes?' I thought looking at Rob lying beside me. 'And?'

Maybe some of whatever I was feeling communicated itself to him because he stretched out, slipped an arm around my shoulders and said with a sheepish smile, 'Sorry.'

Then in the time-honoured male fashion, he went immediately to sleep, but I lay awake, listening to his regular breathing until I could see dawn breaking at the window.

What have I done? I said to myself. What have I done?

Nine

THE MORNING AFTER

The next morning, in two separate apartments, there were two hangovers, two guilt complexes, and four very confused people. Both Colette and Rob thought next morning that it would be a wise idea to leave after the minimum amount of conversation. Both their partners of the night before were polite, too polite, and would not meet their eyes when they were making their farewells. Rob and Colette had the distinct impression that Tash and Brett were feeling guilty or had regrets. This hurt their feelings but they decided to be philosophical. Tash and Brett's big romance had only just finished, they each thought. You couldn't expect things to be straightforward straightaway.

In Rob's case, things were made much worse by a phone call late in the morning. He had just rung Tash — after walking around his own place for two hours wondering whether he should or shouldn't — and left a message saying he would like to see her, suggesting dinner. Then his phone rang and he leapt to it, expecting it to be Tash. At the sound of Brett's voice,

he immediately felt very guilty.

'Hi, Robbie,' said Tash, immensely relieved to speak to someone and glad he was home. 'Feel like going down and shooting a few baskets? Loser buys the drinks!'

Brett was the last person Rob wanted to speak to or be with. He was torturing himself over his lapse in loyalty. He is my best friend, he kept saying to himself.

'Uh — sorry,' he said, 'don't feel up to it today. Got a hangover. Thanks anyway.' He sounded like he was going to ring off.

Tash said desperately, 'Well — what about a swim? That's good for ... '

'Ah — no, I can't,' stuttered Rob, 'I've — ah — got to go over to my brother's for lunch, family lunch. Sorry. See you — tomorrow.'

'See you,' said Tash lamely.

Doesn't Brett have any friends? she thought. Who does he *talk* to?

Brett had heard, and ignored, Rob's message. He also heard and ignored a message from Laetitia asking him to call her. He was lying on the couch, ostensibly reading a music magazine, but his eyes kept sliding off the page and staring into nothingness. He'd found a box of chocolates in the kitchen cupboard that Tash

had bought for some aunt last Christmas, but which had not reached their destination. While he lay and gazed and felt miserable, he kept eating chocolates.

'Tash!' a voice suddenly yelled, 'I know you're there. I won't go away.'

Brett was just reaching guiltily for another chocolate. He realised that Laetitia was calling from the street and rose reluctantly to go to the balcony. When he looked down Laetitia was standing on the footpath. She was wearing dark glasses and her favourite Grace Kelly-style hat.

'Let me in, you dag,' she said.

She breezed into the apartment but came to a halt when she saw the mound of chocolate wrappers on the coffee table.

'Granny chocolates!' she exclaimed 'If you're really going to eat yourself into a diabetic coma, you could have done it with a bit more style.'

Brett wondered for half a second what the hell she was talking about but he was too unhappy to wonder for long. He looked away and Laetitia, to her distress, suddenly realised he was crying.

'Oh Tash,' she said, 'don't cry.'

She put her arm around Brett's shoulder and at this, he found himself really losing control. He started sobbing in great gulps, horrified by his tears but unable to stop.

'God, what's *wrong* with me?'

'There's nothing wrong with you.'

She patted his arm and then glanced at the chocolates.

'Look,' she said, 'you're bingeing on chocolate, feeling weepy, you're probably just getting your period.'

Brett looked at her in horror.

'My what?' My *period*!'

To Laetitia's consternation, he burst into even louder sobs. She let him cry for a few minutes thinking with concern that Tash was really having it bad this time. Just after everything was going so well too; the article on page two, the new wardrobe, the big flirtation with Rob last night. Oh well, that was hormones for you.

'It's not that bad, Tash,' she said a few minutes later, thinking it was about time for this crying fit to stop. 'It's only normal after all.'

She expected Tash to now try and smile, to give her head a little shake. Instead, in a voice half choked with sobs, she heard Tash say, 'It's *not* normal. Listen to me, Laetitia, I'm not Tash. I'm only in Tash's body. Tash is in my body. *I am Brett.*'

Laetitia was staring at him in fear and concern. Brett realised that she hadn't believed a single word he'd said.

She spoke to him in the slow, level voice she reserved for dealing with the completely hysterical.

'Tash, you've got to get over this. This is getting crazy. Forget about Brett,' she said with an insistent note in her voice, 'you've got to get your life together.'

Brett gazed at her resignedly. What life? he thought. I don't have a life.

The following morning Brett was sitting in Tash's office, staring out the window. At ten o'clock the tower clock chimed. He looked around the office. It's a life, he thought, but it's not my life.

'I can't do this any more,' he said to himself.

Harrison, the Chief-of-Staff, was approaching him. Brett stood up.

'I quit,' he said.

Brett grabbed his things and walked out. Harrison stared after him, flabbergasted. When he turned around he saw Helen MacMahon gazing at him. There was such a triumphant look on her face that he felt somehow she'd had something to do with Natasha Trevellyn's sudden departure.

At the same time in the T.V. station across the city, the weekly production meeting of the 'express' show was just beginning. While glancing through some schedules Davis, the producer, was as usual inspecting his team. As he himself often said, Davis was an old-fashioned

boss and one of the things he expected of his staff was that they look bright-eyed and bushy-tailed on Monday mornings. If they didn't look bright and alert on Mondays it meant that they'd partied too hard on the weekend and that meant that unless they were exceptionally brilliant or hard-working, they got fired. Davis liked energy. 'Express' was a high-energy show. 'Express' production meetings were high-energy events. Of course Davis actually made all the decisions but he expected people to agree with them in a high-energy way.

This Monday morning as he looked around his team he was displeased. Rob, his director, looked like he hadn't slept for days and was so depressed that even Davis, who was not a kindly man, felt mildly sorry for him. But compared to Brett, Rob looked like he was on a triple dose of Prozac. Brett's face was puffy, his eyes were dull, his hair sat flatly and he was wearing the wrong jacket with his jeans. Moreover while Rob looked anxious, as if upset — or guilty — about something, Brett looked as if he wasn't sure of where he was — and didn't care. Davis was irritated by Rob's appearance and manner, but not too concerned. Rob was a professional. He could do high quality work in his sleep and, Davis suspected, had done so a few times. But Brett was a real worry.

Davis thought his star presenter was becoming

erratic. Two weeks ago he'd come into the production meeting and started taking notes so earnestly you would have thought he was one of the P.A.s. Then the next day, for the first time in anyone's experience, he'd really fluffed the taping of the show. Put on the worst performance that Davis had ever seen. The people upstairs had been shaking their heads. The next week, he seemed better, but only just.

Davis had noticed some subtle changes in Brett's style. Everything seemed to have been pegged back just a couple of points — not quite as laid-back. Not quite as cheeky, not quite as light-hearted, less consciously playing to the viewers, more interested in content. The description that Davis's analytical mind provided was 'mature'.

And in between shows people had been commenting that Brett had been sitting at his computer working. Brett had always done some work but it had mostly not been at his desk. He'd gone to places to hear groups; he'd hung out at studios listening to bands record; he'd gone to the musos' places to hang out; hear what was hot, listen to what people were talking about.

And he'd gone to current events: concerts, shows, openings, fashionable parties, bars and restaurants. He'd been *visible*. This was what Davis expected of him. He wasn't pleased to learn that the new style

Brett was holed up in his office trying to get his mind around things he didn't need to know about.

When he put it all together, Davis realised what was happening. Excited by the possibility of the New York job Brett was trying to remodel himself. He wanted to be more than the guy with the great face and the cheeky grin who hosted the show. Brett was trying to get *serious*.

Davis shook his head to himself. This all had to be stopped. Time for a reality check and this morning when Brett was sitting in the meeting, obviously not paying any attention, was just the time to do it. Davis decided that when the next opportunity presented itself, he would throw Brett a tough question and if Brett didn't have anything useful to say, Davis would let him know gently that even the most popular of talk show hosts are dispensable.

A few minutes later the opportunity presented itself. It was a difficult issue. Davis had been worrying about it all weekend himself and he didn't expect Brett to have any suggestions but he'd use the occasion to teach him his lesson and then move on quickly. Davis knew that public humiliations are always more effective than lectures given in private. Afterwards you can always claim stress of events, apologise, say you just lost it temporarily.

'As you all know,' he said looking around at his

team and noting that Brett's attention had wandered, 'the International Head of Production is flying in to watch this week's show, so we want to make it a great one. Mark Hutchison confirmed, but Jenny Mathieson's cancelled. Any suggestions for a replacement, Brett?'

Davis spoke more sharply than he'd intended. Brett looked like he was going to sleep. Tash roused herself, reminded herself that she was prepared for this and then leafed through her research files while Davis and the rest of the team waited.

'Right, yes,' she said, finally locating what she wanted. 'I've developed a formula to predict who will rate well, based upon guests' past appearances and rating reports. And I think we should get ... Karen Zader.'

To her astonishment everyone in the meeting, including Rob who'd been looking sombre, burst out laughing. Davis said dryly, 'Very amusing, Brett.'

'What's wrong?' Tash was looking at them all. It was apparent to Davis that Brett didn't know why everyone was laughing and he realised that while Brett might follow the careers of singers avidly, he obviously didn't take much interest in their sex lives. He explained, 'Mark Hutchison and Karen Zader haven't spoken a word to each other, let alone appeared in public together, since they broke up three

years ago. I'm sure they'd be overjoyed to have a cosy chat on national T.V.'

The whole production crew started laughing again. Tash had never encountered a problem like this in any of her science interviews but she thought well, how long can they hold a grudge?

'We could ask them,' she insisted. 'Three years. They should be over it by now.'

'Jesus,' thought Davis to himself, 'how many times do I have to explain it?'

He smiled sarcastically. 'She sold the entire story of their break-up to the *Truth*, *with* pictures, and he called his next album *The Bitch in Black*. I'm sure they laugh about it over coffee now.'

Tash felt her face go red. She fell silent. Davis moved on with the meeting.

After the meeting she hung back until the last crew member left the room, hovering at Davis's side, making her intention clear. She knew she had something further to say to Davis. She'd gone through all the figures, done the comparison. She knew, in her Tash-like way, that she was right.

'I know my idea sounds unusual,' she began, 'but I'd like you to consider it. If they agreed, it would be great. An interview with some conflict is what we need.'

Davis looked at her.

'And when did you start knowing what "we"

need? I don't want this New York thing to go to your head, Brett. When this guy comes on Friday to watch the show, you won't be the only one he'll be looking at.'

Tash stared at him. There was a hard ruthless look in his eye that she had not seen before. When she had come to the T.V. station she had thought what an improvement he was over her own boss, the brusque sarcastic Harrison, but now she was realising that Davis's geniality was just a veneer. She also had a sense of something else, a feeling of being manipulated, that she had not had with Harrison. He'd just reacted to her where she felt that Davis was watching her, making judgments, setting plans in place but she told herself she was being paranoid.

Davis came closer to her.

'Producing a T.V. show is like a football game,' he said smoothly. 'It's a team sport. Everyone on the team has a position, and each position has a job to do. Do you know what your job is?'

That was easy. Tash answered promptly.

'To interview. To do whatever I can to make the interviews interesting.'

Davis shook his head.

'To read. That's your job. You can do whatever you want to make your reading entertaining. The rest you can leave to other players on the team.'

He spoke as if he was saying something perfectly obvious. She knew he was serious and she realised that the feeling she'd had of being manipulated wasn't paranoia at all. She was treated in a friendly respectful fashion but she was just a figurehead. Her job — Brett's job — was just to read her lines, be decoration.

She felt shocked. She had worked hard to come up with her idea and she knew it was right, knew it would work. She had been criticised before and people had disagreed with her opinions but never before had she been bluntly told that she was not supposed to think at all. She felt humiliated. Coming on top of her awful weekend, of everything else, it was too much. Tears came to her eyes.

Davis was horrified.

'Christ, Brett, don't cry,' he said in an urgent, low voice.

'What is this?' he thought to himself. 'Is he having a breakdown? Or has he joined one of those men's groups where they get in touch with their emotions?'

Frankly Davis didn't care what it was. He just wanted Brett to stop or, failing that, he didn't want other people to see him. He went and closed the door quickly so that passers-by wouldn't see in.

'Pull yourself together, son,' he said almost gently. 'If you go out looking like this, people'll think we've been axed.'

He handed Brett a large hanky and looked away, intensely uncomfortable, while he mopped at his eyes and wiped his nose. What a *girl* he was sometimes.

As Tash walked out of the meeting room, the P.A.s noticed the red eyes and pretended to look discreetly away. Though Tash was unaware of it, the news of Brett Flinders being in tears would be round the station in less than ten minutes. Tash went straight to Rob's office, desperate for someone sympathetic to talk to.

She was so relieved to find him in his office that she didn't notice his troubled and guilty face. Before she could speak, he blurted out, 'Brett, look man, there's something I've got to tell you — '

Tash was staring at him in surprise. Rob swallowed.

' — I slept with Tash.'

Tash found herself sinking into a chair without realising it in her shock.

'You did what?'

'I know I shouldn't have.' Rob was horrified to see how Brett was taking the news. He didn't seem angry. He just seemed amazed as if he didn't believe this was happening. 'But — I've been in love with her for a long time. You two had broken up, and we'd both had lots to drink ... man, you know how it is.'

Rob still saw on Brett's face that same bemused look, and wondered what his friend was thinking. Tash, in fact, hardly knew herself. She was still trying to absorb it all.

Rob had been in love with her for a long time.

And Brett and Rob had slept together.

Rob was pleading now.

'I don't want this to come between us. You and I have been friends for years, and I'd like to think that ... you know ... ' Rob couldn't think how to end the sentence but 'you know' seemed too vague. He tried to think of something more specific; tried to sum up his whole friendship with Brett.

'I'd like to think,' he said hopefully, 'that we could still play basketball?' There was such an odd look on Brett's face that Rob said desperately, 'C'mon man — say something!'

Tash stood up. 'I have had ENOUGH!' she announced. 'I've been insulted, abused, and punched. I was beaten up in the name of sport, and I've cried in front of the entire office. I just found out my boyfriend slept with another *man*, and all anyone can offer me is a game of basketball. I don't want to play basketball. I don't want to be a man any more. I want to *talk* to someone. I want to be a woman.'

She walked out of the room while Rob stared after her in astonishment.

Ten

GETTING IT TOGETHER

BRETT

'I can't,' said Morgana (or was it Montana?), 'face it anymore. My husband tells me he's in love with my sister and she's having his baby; my son's in gaol for murder; my partner tells me we're bankrupt because he's blown all our money at Vegas and now the house is crawling with the FBI because Juan, the Latino gardener, is really the leader of a Libyan terrorist gang that's trying to assassinate the Pope and it turns out, both me and my daughter were sleeping with him ... ' Morgana/Montana's sister (presumably not the same one who was having the husband's baby) had a concerned look on her face as she listened to all this.

I was a bit puzzled by the stuff about the Pope until I remembered I had been channel hopping. I had been watching Tulsa (or Texas) in the soap on another channel telling *her* sister that *her* son was having a sex-change operation until that had felt, literally, too close to the bone and I'd switched over to Morgana/Montana.

Yes, it had come to this. I had sunk to watching daytime television. I, Brett Flinders, one-time media star, was now just another member of the Jenny Craig set. The only thing which kept me from complete self-disgust was that I had so far refrained from 'Ricki Lake', 'Donahue' and 'Oprah'. I could imagine all too vividly the title of the show that they would be delighted to do about me: 'My Ex-Girlfriend And I Swapped Bodies'.

I switched the T.V. off, listless. As I did so, I heard a knock at the door. It was a quiet, almost tentative knock as if the person was hesitating, undecided about whether to knock or to go away. I was wondering whether to go and answer it when I heard the sound of a key in the lock. The door opened and then Tash was standing in the doorway of the lounge room. She smiled.

I realised how I must look. Lying there on the couch with a rug and a hot water bottle on my stomach and cups and pill packets and chocolate wrappers (yes, the last of the Milk Tray) all over the coffee table. There was also a pot of some revolting herbal tea that I'd found in Tash's cupboard which was supposed to help but after one sip of it, I knew that if there was a choice between drinking it and swallowing arsenic, I'd go for the arsenic any day. Right in the centre of the mess was an empty tissue

box and there were quite a few damp scrunched-up tissues on the mat around the couch but let's not linger on the details, OK? The curtain has just risen on the set of 'Really-Sorry-For-Myself' starring Brett Flinders. In the body of Tash Trevellyn.

Tash stared at me. A look of realisation came in to her eyes.

'Oh, no, you haven't — '

'*Don't* say anything,' I groaned. 'I feel shocking.'

She was trying not to smile.

I took a deep breath. 'I know this is some kind of karma thing, and the whole universe is laughing its head off at me. Well I've got the point. I was wrong. I've been wrong in so many ways I can't count. And I'm sorry.'

I looked over at her, and right then and there the best thing that had happened to me all day took place. The best thing in weeks, in fact. Tash stopped being angry with me.

She came over and sat on the arm of the couch.

'You know, I think this is like one of those three-legged races they had at school,' she said. 'If we keep running in opposite directions, we're not going to get anywhere.'

I looked up at her.

'Yeah, I know. I think we need to help each other.'

Two heads, as people so often say, are better than one. In this case the head that everyone else thought was the 'talking head', so to speak, got on the phone and did the deed while the other head watched, nodding encouragement, mouthing significant words, glaring fiercely to convey determination and looking excited when it became apparent we were going to get what we wanted.

We started with Rob because we thought he'd be easiest although I was very nervous as Tash picked up the phone.

'Hi Robbie,' she said quite normally, as if her hysterical outburst in his office had never happened. While he was still off-balance, she turned tough. 'I think you owe me a favour. I want you to see if you can still get Tash a shot on that science show. We've got the perfect subject.'

Half a minute later, she said, 'Good,' and looked hopefully across at me.

'I think he'll walk through hot coals to get it,' she said as she put the phone down.

'Poor guy,' I said, 'he must be feeling really guilty.'

'I'll make it up to him somehow,' she said.

I stopped myself from asking, 'How, Tash?' We had enough problems as it was.

Dr Albert Kamins was next and was that guy

resistant! Just the tone of his voice as he said 'I do not speak to the press,' would have been enough to put me off under normal circumstances, and I've interviewed a few monosyllabic musicians who'd make Greta Garbo look like an inveterate publicity seeker. He gave me a five-minute lecture on how he'd rung me a few days before at the paper to tell me to stop ringing him.

'Yes, I used to be at the *Australian* and I'm aware of your policy regarding interviews,' I said smoothly, and before he could say goodbye I started my sell. 'But I also know how relevant your research is to many people.'

Tash held up the speech we'd written like an autocue, as I read it. They were her ideas, and I put them across. We were the perfect combination of form and content.

Tash was gesturing excitedly with her free hand. I knew what I had to do. Get passionate. ' ... And just as you have your responsibilities as a scientist, I have my responsibilities as a science journalist, and that is to see that the public get to share in the knowledge that science creates, and which belongs to all humankind.'

Frankly I probably would have used the old we-taxpayers-have-a-right-to-know-what-we're-funding line but the responsibilities of science to all

humankind seemed to be right up Dr Kamins' alley because there was a slight pause and then he said, 'I see your point, Ms Trevellyn.'

I gave Tash an enthusiastic thumbs up for her great copy but the next thing that happened was not such good news. I said OK and hung up.

'He says he'll do it,' I explained to Tash. 'But only on Friday afternoon.'

We both knew what this meant. On Friday evening was the taping of the 'express' show. If I had to interview Kamins just before Tash interviewed Mark and Karen, timing was going to be tight and we would have to do a lot of preparation and rehearsal very fast. But we didn't have any choice.

The next morning Tash marched into Davis' office. I'm sure she did march too. And this time he underestimated his opponent.

Davis had everyone on his staff so psyched out that he rarely had to deal with confrontation. Whereas Tash, in her daily run-ins with Harrison, was a seasoned campaigner. Every time Harrison knocked Tash on the head, she would always pop right back up again. In the end, I think she just wore Davis down. He wasn't used to such persistence. Bart Simpson has nothing on Tash when she's really determined.

'Every player on a team has a right to contribute,' she announced, dumping a pile of notes and charts on

his desk. 'My Zader–Hutchison idea is good. I'm not leaving until you consider it. I've researched the ratings of past shows, and separately these two have always been big drawcards for us. Together, they'd rate through the roof.'

Davis tried to fob her off.

'If you want to try talking their management into it, you can have a go.'

'I have,' she told him brightly. 'They've agreed.'

Davis stared at her disbelievingly. Tash grinned at him,

'I told each of them that the *other* had agreed to appear with them. They *had* to say yes, or else look like they were the one who hadn't gotten over it.'

Davis looked worn out.

'I take it that's a yes then? Great.'

She picked up her files and charts and left.

The next three days we spent working together at Tash's place preparing both interviews. It was a big job because firstly we had to work out good punchy questions that viewers could understand and which would get our interviewees talking. Then we had to brief each other thoroughly so that if Mark or Karen or Dr Kamins said something totally unexpected, Tash and I would not be thrown but would be able to pick up the point and go with it.

This wasn't easy for either of us. I knew nothing,

of course, about Dr Kamins' ground-breaking research but Tash, let me tell you, knew even less about Mark Hutchison and Karen Zader, though their names were in the papers almost every week. It was true she knew about their records and ratings from doing her research but she wouldn't have recognised them if she'd run over them in her car.

It made me nervous. I've never done so much work for an interview. By the time Friday came and I'd finished coaching her, Tash probably knew more about Mark and Karen's relationship and their break-up than they did themselves.

TASH

On the morning of the interview I dressed with particular care and the result was, I considered, pretty impressive.

Brett had given me a little pep-talk, last thing the night before.

'You've got to present yourself as confident and relaxed. Remember they're going to be nervous. So you can't be nervous too. Otherwise they'll pick up on your nerves and the three of you will freeze up.'

'Dr Kamins will be nervous too,' I pointed out.

'I'm not worried about Dr K,' Brett said. 'He's doing it for the good of humankind. That'll keep him going.'

I looked at him. 'Why are Mark and Karen doing it?'

'For the same reason most people do interviews,' he said with a grin. Leaning over the desk between us he whispered in my ear. 'Because we asked them.'

In Brett's bathroom mirror I ran down the checklist Brett had stuck on the wall: ' ... teeth — pretty good. Hair — not bad either. Right, here goes.'

I bravely headed out of the building and then came to a complete halt. Colette was standing on the pavement waiting for me. She looked like she was on the point of tears.

'You haven't returned any of my calls,' she said jumping in before I could speak. 'I just want to talk to you ... '

I immediately felt remorseful. I'd done the very thing that I'd so many times criticised men for doing. I'd avoided a difficult situation.

'Colette, I should have called you,' I said. 'I just didn't know what to say. I — I'm sorry about what happened the other night.'

At this her bottom lip started to quiver.

'Oh! I'm not sorry it happened, it was, um — amazing for me, that's for sure. But I really am — uh — mixed up with someone at the moment, and I can't get involved with anyone else.'

She was gazing at me sadly and I felt sympathetic.

I said, 'There's lots of other guys out there for you, though.'

'You think so?' she said. 'Name one.'

I thought desperately, hunting for a name.

'Rob Masterson! He's often said how much he likes you.'

She looked at me as if I'd just tried to sell her a used sock.

'Anyway, Colette, men aren't everything,' I said, trying to be positive. 'You should be thinking about your career.'

'Modelling,' she laughed, 'there's not much future in that.'

'Something else then?' I had an inspiration. 'What about television? You'd be good.' You've got the necessary depth, I thought. ('And god knows,' I could hear Laetitia remarking at this point, 'she's certainly got the killer instinct.')

Colette brightened at this idea.

'Do you think so?' she chirped, her tears drying before my eyes.

'I do,' I said. 'In fact, why don't I get you to have a chat with Phil Davis, our producer ... '

Brett appeared in the doorway of his office a few minutes after I arrived looking extremely smart in a suit I'd never seen.

'Laetitia found it,' he said twirling around so I could admire it and then stopping dead. Rob was at the door looking at him.

'Tash — I've just come to wish you good luck for today. You'll be great.'

For once confident and relaxed Brett was utterly lost for words.

'Uh — thanks,' he said.

Rob gave him a sad smile and then looked at me. I raised my hand as if to do his and Brett's special handshake but he had turned and gone. Brett hit his head against the door and groaned.

Despite what Brett had said, Dr Kamins looked terribly nervous and out-of-place in the television studio. While Brett lounged in his armchair checking through his questions again, Dr Kamins sat upright peering at the studio lights as if they were about to attack him. I stood off camera highly nervous myself and empathising madly with him. But Brett seemed unconcerned. Just before the floor manager began his countdown, however, he leaned over to Dr Kamins.

'Don't let it freak you. Try and imagine it's just you and me having a private conversation.'

Kamins looked so taken aback by this that he seemed momentarily to forget his nervousness.

The floor manager said, 'Standby,' and Brett

grinned across at me. Even on my face it was his familiar grin that I'd first seen in the doorway the night we met.

Then the floor manager cued him and Brett gave Dr Kamins and the world in general a dazzling smile, and then addressed Dr Kamins, in a tone that suggested they were in the habit of getting together once a week to discuss his research and were now finally going public, 'Dr Kamins, we're very grateful to you for speaking to us. We know this is the first time you've spoken to the press about your new research. Can you tell us what you've discovered about human reproduction and evolution?'

To my delight, I saw Dr Kamins immediately relax in response to Brett's warmth and interest.

'For years,' he began, 'we've known that evolution and natural selection was the basic driving force behind human mating, as it is for any other animal. But we did not know if there was anything behind the very specific choices that people make in choosing their partners.'

As he was speaking a screen background of magnificent genes began to swim behind him and Brett.

'We've been studying the genes of thousands of couples, and what we've found is that in the majority of cases, people's natural instinct will subconsciously lead them to choose the person who is the perfect

genetic complement for them. It seems that when we see someone to whom we are attracted, we are actually carrying out very complicated genetic observations and calculations, without realising it. A kind of gene math.'

'Does this mean there's a scientific basis to "love at first sight"?' Brett asked.

'Yes,' said Dr Kamins leaning forward in his excitement, 'and also in other folk wisdoms, such as "opposites attract". We found in our research that many people were attracted to those who were very different from them. Often these people would later worry about this, and try to change their partner — physically and behaviourally — to be more like themselves.'

I felt rather than saw Brett nodding at this. I could feel how intensely we were both listening.

'However, we found that in these cases,' Dr Kamins said, 'the opposition of their genes in fact formed a perfect genetic complement. Like Male and Female in the first place. Nature had a very good reason for putting them together.'

The camera was on Dr Kamins. Brett looked over at me and our eyes met knowingly.

We hurtled down the corridors to the make-up room where I threw myself in the chair. Vanessa was miming

despair and suicide as we raced in. She picked up the phone and urgently dialled an extension.

'He's here,' she said.

A second later, the make-up artist came rushing in.

'Oh, Brett,' she said to me, 'that's the third time running that you've cut yourself shaving. What's wrong with you lately?'

I could see Brett in the mirror waiting with amusement for my explanation. I gave him a smile and said, 'I seem to have lost the knack.'

Vanessa, Brett's P.A., told me later that Mark Hutchison and Karen Zader both came with large entourages. I am glad I didn't know this because it would have made me even more nervous than I already was. I was hustled into the studio half a minute before they arrived with all the Publicity Department, various P.A.s and assorted offsiders plus several other people whom I'd never seen before, all hovering and trying to give the impression that everything was in place and running smoothly.

At first I assumed that all this extra carry-on was because of the star guests but then I saw Davis sitting with another man off-set and realised that this was the executive from the American network. The man who was going to decide Brett's future — and mine, incidentally, because it would obviously be me who

went to New York unless our transformation got reversed. My throat was dry. I swallowed.

The star guests walked in through different doors, but at exactly the same time, as if somebody had been coordinating their movements. They both smiled and shook hands with me and then said 'Hi' to each other and brushed each other's cheeks with their lips.

Well, appeared to brush is more accurate. I was the only person at the angle to notice it but I would have said there was a good inch of air between their lips and each others' cheeks. Nevertheless Karen's make-up artist whipped onto the set and checked her lips and gave her cheek bones a quick brush. Mark watched ironically. I suddenly noticed Brett, standing behind the cameras, was looking edgy. He was trying to run his fingers through his hair — my hair — and finding that it didn't work.

When he saw me glancing at him, he made an immediate effort to appear calm. He gestured at me to relax my body and pointed to my teeth and eyes, miming a big smile. I nodded and remembered the first time I had done the show. *Andhi ... That scrammed* ... suddenly from the safe distance of a month it seemed very funny. I didn't even register the countdown. When the 'one' came I was leaning back in my chair, smiling broadly, 'We're here with our special guests Karen Zader and Mark Hutchison,' I

began. 'Karen, you've always been big here, but it's only in the last three years it's really happened for you. Why's that?'

'Three years ago there was a lot of negative stuff draining my energy,' Karen sighed. She started off sounding thoughtful and it was a few seconds before I realised she was being double-edged. 'These days I can put all my energy into my music.'

Mark must have known what was going on the instant she walked into the room because he said, with a grin towards the camera, 'Three years ago you spent more time trying to get yourself on magazine covers than you did in the studio.'

Karen gave him a slow icy look and said, 'Just because no one's wanted to interview you since anyone can remember!'

'There's nothing left to tell,' said Mark bitterly, 'since you sold the entire story of my private life to the gutter press!'

I was looking at them in alarm. My immediate urge was to calm things down, say, 'Now, look, would you like us to stop filming for a minute? You can both cool it — we'll start again.' Then I could almost hear Brett saying to me, 'Close them down? Don't be ridiculous. They've been spoiling for this fight for the last three years. They know they're doing it on national television and they don't give a shit!'

Karen was now going in for the kill. 'They would have found out anyway, sweetheart,' she said, fixing to put the knife right between his eyes. 'You were sleeping with our publicist.'

I threw the camera a sort of mock how-unfortunate look. As I did so I saw that the people behind the camera were grinning. Brett was pointing to the American television executive who was sitting with Davis. They were both looking ecstatic. The American was nodding approvingly. Brett was bouncing up and down in his version of my victory dance. Everyone loved it.

After that I can't recall whether I actually got a chance to ask more than a couple of our carefully prepared questions and even they weren't really necessary. I soon saw that while Brett and I had done a lot of work together preparing for this interview, it was nothing compared to the amount of work that Mark and Karen had put in separately. They'd been rehearsing this confrontation for the last three years and they were both really enjoying putting on the show. This was going to be one of the most talked about — and repeated — interviews on television for some time.

Afterwards the general hubbub of post-show drinks was much noisier and far more excited than usual. As Mark and Karen left the studio — by

separate doors, both furiously abusing their publicists — people started clapping and cheering. Brett and I were crushed close together in the crowd. It was too noisy to say anything, we just looked at each other, smiling. Then I saw Davis making his way towards me.

'I'm going off now for a final meeting with him,' he said glancing at the visiting network executive. 'I'll call you as soon as I have a decision. It's looking good though.'

'Yes!' said Brett, clenching his fist in victory, and punching Davis on the arm. Davis gave him a look that said, 'Oh, god, not another lunatic,' and escaped back into the crowd.

Brett grinned and raised his glass to me.

'Congratulations.'

I looked at him more seriously. 'Friends?' I asked.

'Friends,' he said, clinking his glass against mine.

'What are you doing after the party, friend?' I asked with a grin.

Brett eyed his glass which was getting empty. 'Drinking more champagne.'

'Want to come back to your place?' I asked, a little bit scared of our new-found friendship.

'You're on,' he said.

Brett noticed when he walked in that his place looked different. Nothing had been moved but Tash had

added bowls of flowers, some knick-knacks, a couple of cushions on the couch. He thought looking around that, oddly enough, her softening touches and his spare lines complemented one another. The cushions she'd put on the couch enhanced its colour. The bowls of flowers on the table emphasised the elegance of the design. After a minute or two it all looked as if it had always been here and the room seemed more comfortable, relaxed.

'I'll get the glasses,' he said to Tash. She smiled and went to open the windows. The night seemed peaceful and calm and there was a soft distant murmur that could have been traffic, or the wind. She took a deep breath. The week had been so busy she'd scarcely been aware of the external world. But now she looked out and saw the shapes of the buildings, the silhouettes of trees against the streetlights. Over to the east there was a major road with a chain of car lights upon it like bright golden beads and beyond that was the moon, coming up over the horizon as she watched. In a minute it was shining full and pale and mysterious over the city.

A champagne cork popped behind her. She turned, Brett was holding out a glass.

While he was pouring one for himself, she came over to join him on the couch. He raised his glass in a toast.

'Here's to your new career as a T.V. science journalist.'

They toasted and drank. Brett cleared his throat. 'Course, at the moment it'll actually be *my* job, till we change back. If we change back. But after that, it'll be yours.'

She thought of how hard he'd worked to understand Dr Kamins' work so that *she* wouldn't be embarrassed in her first television interview.

'Thank you,' she smiled.

The brightness of her smile dimmed a little but with an effort she kept her tone light. 'And you are going to get your dream. Eventually, anyway, I hope.'

She was happy for him, but sad knowing what it meant to them. New York. New York would be in daylight now while here the stars were out. The difference in times made it seem even more distant.

Brett, watching her, knew what she was thinking and felt sad too. It seemed to each of them that in the past week of working together they had come to understand and to appreciate each other more.

'I couldn't have done it without you,' he said. She started to laugh.

'Certainly not under *these* circumstances.'

They were both laughing. Then they stopped.

'Oh well, I'm kinda getting used to being you,' said Brett.

She was startled. After everything they'd been through, it seemed, to her, the deepest compliment. 'Really?' she said.

He shrugged again, feeling awkward. She reached out and touched his hand in thanks. He looked at her. Slowly he ran his fingers over hers and folded her hand in his. There was almost a shiver of desire between them. Tash slowly withdrew her hand.

'Why didn't it work out for us?' she asked.

Brett was about to shrug his shoulders, then he stopped himself.

'I guess I wasn't the right guy for you after all. I never lived up to your expectations. I wasn't what you wanted.'

She stared at him in surprise. It had never occurred to her that he felt like this. To her, he had so much, the world seemed to come to him so easily. She had not understood that he saw her setting standards for him which he knew he could not meet.

Her eyes looked sad. It seemed they had missed one another.

'The only thing I ever really wanted is for you to love me,' she said quietly.

It was his turn to look surprised. 'But I always have.'

They looked and looked at each other like people who have been separated for years and were now

seeing each other again for the first time. Slowly they drew closer, their lips touched and they kissed.

In the bedroom one small lamp threw dark shadows over the walls. Tash's hands moved over Brett's stomach, his back, and effortlessly undid the clasp of his bra. She slid it off his shoulders and Brett stretched his body out alongside hers, skin touching skin. As his naked breasts touched her chest, he caught his breath and whispered, 'Ooh baby.'

Tash leaned back and looked him in the eyes.

'Why don't you let me do this? I have a feeling I know what you'll like.'

She rose up on her elbows until the two of them were sitting upright, face to face. Slowly she leaned forward, lowering Brett back down on to the bed beneath her. She held her face close above his, and looked into his eyes, as she began to run her fingers, very lightly, back and forth across his nipples.

Pleasure crossed his face like a shadow. Tash kissed him and they devoured each other's lips. She kissed his mouth, then his breasts. Brett caught his breath sharply, and a spark of fear lit his eyes. He looked up at Tash's face above him and said, 'This is really weird.'

Tash reached out and took one of his hands. She brought it up close by his face on the pillow, and wrapped it in hers.

They both closed their eyes as they moved into a rhythm of intense waves of pleasure. Brett moaned. Sweat began to run down Tash's stomach and glistened on Brett too. They were a tangle of limbs and kisses. Lips were bitten and brushed, hair was kissed.

Afterwards they lay asleep in the darkness in a tangle of sheets, side by side, close together with Tash's arms wrapped around Brett.

The windows were open and small currents of air began to breathe into the room and cooled their bodies. Outside, the full moon rose, shining brightly in a clear, dark sky.

The moonlight poured into the window, turning the two bodies silver. All became very quiet. There was just the murmur of their breathing, in and out, like a sea with two tides.

Then their faces began to glow in the moonlight. Their breathing became stronger, fell in unison, breath rushing in and out. A stream of glowing particles flowed between them, and their bodies switched back. Their breathing separated again and the glow faded from their faces. The moon, large and silver and mysterious, rose above the window high into the sky.

Eleven

MOVING ON UP

The morning light woke Brett and as he stirred, he rubbed his eyes. In his half sleep he was strangely aware of something, the feel of his hand. He opened his eyes and stared at the hand he was holding in front of his face. It was large, with long strong fingers and distinct dark hairs. He touched his jaw, his chest. He was hairy again. Definitely hairy again. For a half-second, he felt relief and then a strange flatness. He had always expected to bound out of bed happy, excited, to be himself again.

Now he looked beside him and saw Tash lying next to him. In her sleep she looked small and vulnerable and he became aware that their hands were entwined. He caressed the tips of the fingers that were clasped through his own and it woke her. Releasing his hand she stirred, rubbed her eyes, frowned and stopped. She looked up at Brett, lying on his side, watching her.

'We've changed back,' she said solemnly.

He nodded.

They were both silent, feeling confused and

unsure of what the other was feeling. Neither had expected this sense of anti-climax.

Finally Tash said, 'You must be glad.'

She sounded defensive. He could not think what to say and after a bit just muttered, 'Oh, yeah — I suppose I am.'

The awkward silence was cut by the ringing of the phone. Tash, out of habit, picked it up.

'Brett,' said the voice.

'Yes, speaking,' she said, and then realised her mistake when she heard how her voice sounded. Light, high, and gentle.

'Oh — sorry,' she stumbled. She handed the phone to Brett. 'It's Davis.'

Brett's face was grave. He was listening intently saying yes, OK. Tash turned away from him and faced the window. She didn't turn around when he hung up.

'I got the job,' he said quietly. 'They want me to go and meet them now. And they might want me to fly back to the States with him this afternoon.'

'This is how it happens,' Tash was thinking. 'You try and prepare yourself, you always pretend there'll be more time. Start talking before you end up in tears.'

She closed her eyes but she managed to make her voice sound bright.

'That's great. Congratulations.'

Once she'd said that she was actually able to turn over and face him with a smile. 'I mean, you have to go. You can't turn something like this down.'

He was confused, and a little hurt.

'No. I suppose not,' he said. She was obviously more pragmatic than he'd thought.

'I'll drive you to the airport if you want. Do you want a hand to pack?'

They both thought it was all happening too fast and they were saying these lines as if they'd learnt them somewhere. As if this wasn't really happening.

'It's not definite yet that they want me to fly out today. I'd better get over there and find out.'

'Sure. Call me later. I'll be back at my place.'

She kept her face turned away from his as she pulled on the suit he'd worn the day before to the television station. The buttons on the jacket were on the wrong side. The waistband felt strange. Her fingers fumbled with the back zipper of the skirt. At first she was glad of all the activity that putting on her own clothes again seemed to involve. It stopped her from looking at him and letting him see her tear-filled eyes and stricken face. But in the end she couldn't deal with any more of it. She stuffed her pantyhose into her handbag and let herself out of the flat just minutes after he had gone.

For Tash, the day ticked away slowly. She sat on the couch in her lounge room, watching the clock. At three-thirty the intercom buzzed. She leapt to answer it.

'Tash,' Brett said, 'it's me.'

'Hi, come in.' She pressed the buzzer.

'Can you come down? I've got a taxi waiting.'

She felt herself grow cold. She grabbed her keys and hurried out.

When she opened the door she saw Brett standing in the street next to a taxi. The engine was running and it was loaded with suitcases.

Tears came to Tash's eyes and began to run down her cheeks. She had never thought there would be so little time. In a few minutes he would be gone, and she had no chance to tell him all the things she needed to, and how much she regretted all her spiky and difficult ways.

'I'm sorry,' she cried. 'I'm happy for you. It's just that — I'm sorry, I'm sorry about everything, I'm sorry I wasn't what you wanted. I didn't help you either. I didn't support you. I just didn't realise until it was too late.'

Brett gave her a long look and started to smile.

'*Nearly* too late.'

She stopped crying and stared at him. Brett turned to the taxi driver and motioned him to turn the engine off.

'You turned the job down?' she asked.

He shook his head.

'So you're going?'

He shook his head again.

Face all tear-stained, she stared up at him.

'What?'

He began to walk towards her.

'I got the job. But I remembered what you said about using the best that science and technology can offer. And I thought, if they want a really modern show, why should it be limited by geography when cyberspace is endless? Why have one compere in New York? Why not have comperes all over the world connected via satellite from their own cities? Like the Internet on T.V. A really global program.'

He smiled at her.

'And they really flipped over the idea.'

She started to laugh and cry at the same time. He grinned.

'So stop crying and help me with the bags. This taxi's going to cost me a fortune.'

He turned to start unloading the suitcases onto the street. She stood looking at him, still unsure. 'If you're not leaving, then what are the bags for?' she asked.

He was unloading them with surprising speed and ease onto the footpath. One tipped to fall over, and

when she jumped forward to straighten it, she realised that it was empty. She grabbed another and then realised that they all were. She looked at him questioningly.

'If you're going to move in to my place, you're going to need extra cases to pack all your stuff in,' he said casually.

She slowly lowered the suitcase in her hand.

'Are you asking me to move in with you?'

Brett nodded and a cheeky look came over Tash's face. She walked towards him.

'I'm messy . . . ' she said warningly.

'You're just aesthetically relaxed.'

'I'm too punctual.'

'I've been working on my punctuality.'

'We've got nothing in common,' she sighed.

He pulled her to him and kissed her. 'Perfect.'

And so Nature was happy again, for everything was as it should be.

Or perhaps not quite.

High above, from her balcony, Laetitia looked down on this scene of perfect romance. She had a vision of the whole world paired in happy couples, and herself living alone at ninety in a flat full of cats. She sighed, half in exasperation, half in envy, and looked up.

On the other side of the street, Rob, looking similarly forlorn, gazed down on the same scene. He turned away, and noticed Laetitia.

She smiled at him. And he smiled back.

She's got everything he wants. His body, his life *and* his favourite leather jacket. Now he wants them back!

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